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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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No US role in Pak ceasefire: PM tells Trump

After the call with Modi, Trump repeats claim he stopped war; PM declines invite to US

KANANASKIS, 18 JUNE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi firmly told US President Donald Trump that the cessation of military hostilities between India and Pakistan last month was the result of direct talks between the two militaries, with no role played by the United States.

In a 35-minute phone conversation on Tuesday, Modi clarified that India does not and will "never accept" foreign mediation, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said. He added that the talks were initiated by Pakistan and took place through existing military channels.

Hours after the phone conversation with Modi, Trump on Wednesday repeated his persistent claim that he stopped a war between India and Pakistan.

The US president had earlier claimed credit for brokering the ceasefire announced on May 10, stating he had threatened to halt trade with both nations if fighting continued. Modi rejected this, stating that India's Operation Sindoor, launched on 7 May in response to the Pahalgam terror attack, is ongoing and focused on precise, non-escalatory strikes against terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

Modi also declined Trump's

request to stop over in the US while returning from Canada, citing prior commitments. However, he extended an invitation for Trump to attend the next Quad Summit in India, which Trump accepted.

Misri said India inflicted significant damage on Pakistan's military assets during the May 9–10 clashes, rendering airbases inoperable. The fierce response, he noted, compelled Pakistan to request a halt to hostilities. Trump and Modi also discussed the Israel-Iran conflict and stressed the need for direct talks between Russia and Ukraine. On the Indo-Pacific, both reaffirmed support for the Quad's role in regional stability. Modi reiterated that terrorism is now viewed by India not as a proxy war but as a war in itself, and that any act of aggression from Pakistan would be met with a stronger response. *—PTI*

TRUMP TO HOST PAK ARMY CHIEF FOR LUNCH

Washington, 18 June

US President Donald Trump will host Pakistan Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir for lunch at the White House on Wednesday at 1 pm (local time), marking a significant moment in US-Pakistan military ties. Islamabad has hailed the White House invitation as a major diplomatic win. Munir, recently elevated to Pakistan's rare five-star rank—the first since Ayub Khan in 1959—is in Washington to discuss regional security and counterterrorism cooperation. *—PTI*

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Ties thaw as India, Canada agree to restore High Commissioners

KANANASKIS, 18 JUNE

India and Canada have agreed to restore High Commissioners to each other's capitals at the earliest opportunity, marking the first step towards stabilising a strained but significant bilateral relationship, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney held a "very positive and constructive" meeting on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in Kananaskis. Both leaders agreed to resume senior- and working-level mechanisms across areas such as trade, connectivity, and people-to-people ties.

Tensions escalated last year when India recalled High Commissioner Sanjay Verma and five other diplomats after Canada linked them to the killing of pro-Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. India also expelled six Canadian diplomats in retaliation. The restoration of diplomatic presence marks a thaw in relations.

PM Narendra Modi meets with his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney during G7 Summit at Kananaskis, Canada **PHOTO: PTI**

The two leaders reaffirmed the importance of India-Canada ties, based on shared democratic values, respect for the rule of law, and commitment to upholding the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. The statement carries added significance as India has been consistently urging Canada to prevent pro-Khalistani elements from carrying out anti-India activities on its soil.

Modi and Carney also discussed collaboration in clean energy, digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence, food security, and critical minerals. They agreed to resume talks on the Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA), paving the way for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). In a social media post, Modi said India and Canada are united by a belief in democracy, freedom, and the rule of law. Both leaders agreed to stay in close contact and meet again soon to maintain momentum in bilateral ties. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 3 & 6

Now, Voter IDs to be delivered within 15 days

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The Election Commission (EC) has announced that voter identity cards will now be delivered within 15 days, significantly reducing the previous delivery time of over a month. A new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been introduced to ensure faster service following new voter enrolments or changes to existing records. The EC's recently launched ECINet platform will track every stage of the card's journey, from generation by the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) to delivery by the Department of Posts (DoP). Voters will receive SMS updates at each stage. An integrated API between ECINet and the DoP will ensure smooth and secure delivery. This initiative aims to streamline workflow, enhance efficiency, and improve transparency. It is part of a series of reforms the Commission has undertaken in recent months to better serve electors. ***—PTI***

Assembly bypolls for 5 seats to be held today

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Polling is set to begin at 7am on 19 June for by-elections to five Assembly seats across Punjab, West Bengal, Gujarat, and Kerala. These will be the first elections held under Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, who took office in February. Results will be declared on 23 June. Though limited in scale, the bypolls are politically significant for both the ruling NDA and the Opposition. In Punjab's Ludhiana (West), the AAP is aiming to retain the seat following the death of MLA Gurpreet Singh Gogi. ***—PTI***

>>>More on Page 3

Hindi to be taught as 3rd language in M'rashtra schools

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

The Maharashtra government has issued an order saying Hindi will be taught as the third language to students in Marathi and English medium schools in the state from classes 1 to 5. An amended government order issued on Tuesday said Hindi will "generally" be the third language, instead of being mandatory, but gave an option to opt out if 20 students per grade in a school express the desire to study any Indian language other than Hindi. ***—PTI***

>>>More on Page 3

Arnala at sea **PHOTO WIKIPEDIA**

Navy gets anti-sub shallow water craft

VISAKHAPATNAM, 18 JUNE

The Indian Navy welcomed INS Arnala, its first anti-submarine warfare shallow water craft, into service on Wednesday during a commissioning ceremony at the Naval Dockyard. The event was presided over by Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, who highlighted the Navy's significant evolution from a "buyer's navy" to a "builder's navy," a move he deemed crucial for the nation's "Blue Water aspirations."

Measuring 77m in length and displacing over 1490 tonnes, INS Arnala is the largest Indian naval vessel powered by a diesel engine-waterjet combination. The ceremony was led by Vice Admiral Rajesh Pendharkar, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Naval Command, and attended by senior naval officials, distinguished civilians, former Commanding Officers of the original 'Arnala', and representatives from key shipbuilding firms, including Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers and Larsen & Toubro.

Significantly, the warship boasts over 80 per cent indigenous content and integrates advanced systems from leading Indian defence industries, such as Bharat Electronics Limited and Mahindra Defence. Named after the historic Arnala Fort in Maharashtra, constructed in 1737 by the Marathas, the vessel pays homage to India's rich maritime heritage. This marks the official induction of the first of 16 planned vessels in the anti-submarine warfare series. *—PTI*

Khamenei rejects Trump's surrender call

DUBAI, 18 JUNE

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has vowed never to surrender to US or Israeli pressure, warning that any American military involvement would bring "irreparable damage."

Khamenei in series of posts on Wednesday warned the "terrorist Zionist regime" and said "the battle begins"

His fiery statement came hours after US President Donald Trump called for Iran's "unconditional surrender" and left open the possibility of joining Israeli strikes.

Trump would not say on Wednesday whether he has decided to order a US strike on Iran. "I may do it, I may not do it mean, nobody knows what I'm going to do."," Trump

Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz confirmed fighter jets struck the Iranian regime's internal security headquarters in Tehran. A large plume of smoke was seen rising from eastern Tehran, though the exact target remains unclear. Late Wednesday, internet access across Iran crashed, with a pro-Israel hacking group claiming responsibility for a cyberattack on a major bank—potentially the first critical infrastructure breach of the conflict.

Iranian state TV aired a statement from Khamenei, read by an anchor, warning the US that direct involvement would result in lasting consequences. A separate video was expected later. Khamenei urged Iranians to "continue their work with strength and trust in God."

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei **PHOTO: PTI**

Meanwhile, Israel began easing civilian restrictions after six days of conflict, reopening workplaces with access to shelters. Katz declared it a "message of victory," citing reduced Iranian missile launches and effective Israeli defences.

Russia and the UAE jointly called for an immediate halt to the conflict and renewed political efforts. Back in Israel, officials ruled out negotiations with Iran, with Katz suggesting a possible regime collapse: "A tornado passes over Tehran... this is how dictatorships collapse," he wrote on X. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 5,6 & 7

INDIA LAUNCHES OP SINDHU TO EVACUATE NATIONALS FROM IRAN

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

India on Wednesday announced launching 'Operation Sindhu' to evacuate Indian nationals from Iran.

Meanwhile, there were reports of some Indian students sustaining injuries in a strike on a medical students' dormitory in Keshavarz street area in Tehran.

More than 4,000 Indians are living in Iran and half of them are students.

The MEA said the Indian embassy in Tehran has evacuated 110 Indian students from northern Iran, assisting them in safely crossing over into Armenia on Tuesday.

The students have travelled by road to the Armenian capital, Yerevan, under the supervision of the Indian missions in Iran and Armenia.

"These students departed Yerevan on a special flight at 1455 hours on June 18 and will arrive in New Delhi in the early hours of June 19," the MEA said.

New Delhi said it is grateful to the governments of Iran and Armenia for the smooth facilitation of the evacuation process. *—PTI*

Indian students evacuated from Iran as India begins Operation Sindhu **PHOTO: MEA ON X**

HC tells Centre to resume MGNREGA in Bengal

KOLKATA, 18 JUNE

The Calcutta High Court has directed the central government to resume implementation of the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) scheme in West Bengal from 1 August, 2025. The scheme had been suspended in the state for nearly three years following allegations of widespread irregularities and illegal disbursal of wages.

A division bench, led by Chief Justice TS Sivagnanam and Justice Chaitali Chatterjee (Das), stated that while the Centre is entitled to investigate past irregularities—particularly in the districts of Purba Bardhaman, Hooghly, Malda, and the GTA area of Darjeeling—it must also ensure that genuine beneficiaries are not denied work or wages indefinitely.

The court allowed the Centre to impose special conditions and regulatory checks specific to West Bengal to prevent recurrence of misuse. It noted that recoveries had already been made and funds deposited with the state's MGNREGA nodal agency.

The bench emphasised that the purpose of the Act is to provide rural employment and cannot be kept in abeyance indefinitely due to unresolved disputes. While distinguishing between past misuse and future implementation, the court said the scheme must resume in the public interest.

The ruling comes amid political friction, with the ruling TMC accusing the BJP-led Centre of withholding funds unfairly. *—PTI*

FOR A YEAR

New FASTags to allow 200 trips on NH for ₹3,000

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari announced on Wednesday that the government will introduce an annual FASTag pass for private vehicles, priced at Rs 3,000, effective from 15 August. This initiative aims to streamline highway travel across India.

In a message on X, Gadkari stated that the pass will be valid for one year from activation or until 200 trips are completed, whichever comes first. It is specifically designed for non-commercial private vehicles, including cars, jeeps, and vans.

The Minister highlighted that the annual pass will facilitate seamless and cost-effective travel on National Highways nationwide. A dedicated activation and renewal link will soon be available on the Rajmarg Yatra App, as well as on the official websites of NHAI and MoRTH.

This new policy addresses long-standing concerns related to toll plazas located within a 60km radius and simplifies toll payments through a single, affordable transaction **PHOTO: PTI**

Gadkari indicated that the average cost of passing through a toll plaza would be approximately Rs 15 from 15 August, 2025. This new policy addresses long-standing concerns related to toll plazas located within a 60km radius and simplifies toll payments through a single, affordable transaction.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) clarified that existing FASTag holders will not need to purchase new tags; the annual pass can be activated on current FASTags that meet eligibility criteria. The pass is exclusively valid at National Highway and National Expressway fee plazas, with any use in commercial vehicles resulting in deactivation.

- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways clarified that existing FASTag holders will not need to purchase new tags; the annual pass can be activated on current FASTags.

The ministry reassured users that the existing FASTag system will remain operational, allowing those who do not opt for the annual pass to continue using their FASTags for regular transactions at applicable toll rates. *—PTI*

Police jeep collides with Togadia's car in Bagalkot

BAGALKOT, 18 JUNE

A police convoy jeep collided with the vehicle of Praveen Togadia, the International President of the Vishwa Hindu Parishat, on Tuesday night in Bagalkot district. Togadia was en route to a public rally in Jamakhandi after addressing a gathering in Mudhol when the incident occurred on the bypass road at Jirgyal. The police Bolero jeep, trailing approximately 50 metres behind Togadia's car, crashed into his vehicle as it slowed down. Fortunately, the airbags deployed immediately following the impact, and no injuries were reported among the occupants of Togadia's car. Authorities confirmed that an investigation into the accident would take place—*Salar News*

BBMP engineer arrested over ₹10 lakh bribe

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Lokayukta officials have arrested a senior engineer of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) for allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 10 lakh. HV Yarappa Reddy, who heads the CV Raman Nagar Division, was apprehended while allegedly soliciting the bribe from a contractor in exchange for processing a long-pending bill. The complainant, Hemanth GM, approached the Lokayukta, reporting that Reddy had demanded the payment to clear the bill. Following this, the Lokayukta police set up a trap and caught the executive engineer during the transaction. The entire amount of the bribe was confiscated and is now secured for further legal action. Reddy is currently in custody, undergoing interrogation regarding the incident. —*PTI*

Human skeletal remains discovered in City flat

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

The City police discovered human skeletal remains, including a skull, within a percolation pit at an apartment complex in City. These remains were uncovered on 16 June at MN Credence Flora Apartments, located in the New Mico Layout area. According to officials from the Begur Police station, the bones have been sent for forensic analysis, with results expected within a week. An Unnatural Death Report has been filed following a complaint from the president of the residents' welfare association. The skeletal remains were unearthed by workers hired to clean the pit. Authorities are now investigating the origins of the remains to determine the circumstances surrounding this unsettling discovery. —*PTI*

Narayana hosp marks milestone in cancer treatment

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

In a landmark development for cancer care in India and for Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell (CAR T) therapy, two patients in City have completed three years of successful follow-up, one of the longest documented survivals in South India. The patients were treated with CAR T therapy for relapsed follicular lymphoma. In a press conference organised by Narayana Health on Wednesday, Dr Sharat Damodar, Chairman of the Oncology Collegium at Narayana Health, said these cases reflect the transformative potential of CAR T therapy for patients who have exhausted all other options. Narayana Health had treated two patients – a woman aged 66 and a man aged 43. "With this therapy now approved by the Drug Controller General of India and commercially available, Indian patients no longer need to look abroad," said Damodar. —*PTI*

Nandini outlets to open at Metro stations: DKS

Amid Amul-Nandini row, the Deputy Chief Minister says that no one bid for the tenders

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Amid a controversy over the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) allowing dairy giant Amul to open retail outlets at Metro stations in the City, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said the Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF) was asked set up Nandini outlets at such stations.

Shivakumar's response comes in the wake of criticism from several organisations, who accused the State government of favouring Amul over KMF's own dairy brand, Nandini.

"The KMF has been instructed to submit an application to BMRCL to open Nandini outlets at eight Metro stations," he told reporters here.

"BMRCL had issued a global tender and Amul was the sole applicant. We have now directed KMF to apply as well. KMF will open Nandini outlets in eight Metro stations. Amul has already opened outlets at two stations. It is not appropriate to shut down existing ones. We've asked BMRCL to allow Nandini outlets at the remaining stations," Shivakumar said.

Additional outlets are planned at Pattandur Agrahara, Indiranagar, Trinity Circle, Sir M Visvesvaraya, Jayanagara, Majestic, National College, and Banashankari stations.

A BMRCL official told PTI that Amul currently operates outlets at Benniganahalli and Byappanahalli Metro stations.

The official added that Nandini had previously opened outlets at MG Road, Mahalakshmi, and Vijayanagar stations. Of these, only the Vijayanagar outlet remains operational. "For us, both Nandini and Amul are equal. Whoever pays the rent will be allowed to operate," the official said.

The move has reignited the debate between Amul and the KMF's flagship brand Nandini.

Tensions over Amul's presence in the State first escalated in December 2022, following Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to KMF facilities in Mandya. It triggered concerns among farmers and political parties about a possible attempt by the Gujarat-based dairy giant – viewed as an outsider- to expand its footprint at the expense of Nandini.

During his visit, Shah called for cooperation between Amul and KMF, suggesting joint efforts could lead to primary dairies in every village within three years.

He also mentioned the possibility of technical support from Amul to Nandini.

—*Salar News with agencies*

DyCM DK Shivakumar receives a Guinness World Record certificate from adjudicator Swapnil Dangarikar for a milestone in water conservation, in Bengaluru, on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

> BMRCL had issued a global tender and Amul was the sole applicant. We have now directed KMF to apply as well. KMF will open Nandini outlets in eight Metro stations. It is not appropriate to shut down existing (Amul) ones. We've asked BMRCL to allow Nandini outlets at the remaining stations.
>
> -DK Shivakimar, Deputy Chief Minister

> If the Congress govt truly intended to promote Nandini, the tender should have ensured KMF a level playing field from the beginning. Calling it a "global tender" but receiving only one application raises serious doubts about transparency and outreach. The process appears flawed.
>
> -PC Mohan, BJP MP

DKS SAYS E-KHATA CAMPAIGN TO GO ON FOR A MONTH

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said that e-khatas will start being delivered from page 1 July in the City. However, he flagged a low turnout and said that the campaign would go one for a month.

"We have designed a campaign for disbursal of e-khatas in Bengaluru. The campaign was kicked off on a pilot basis in Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda's constituency," he said. "As many as 25,000 e-khatas are ready and they will be delivered to the doorsteps from 1 July. There are about 25 lakh residences and only about 5 lakh people have uploaded the documents. The campaign will go on for a month".

Replying to a query if there was a discussion on issuing B khatas, he said, "This has been discussed in the Cabinet meeting. We will make an announcement after deliberating on the legal aspects."

—*Salar News*

State to fill 35,000 vacancies in power sector

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday announced that his government will begin phased recruitment to fill 35,000 vacant posts in the Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Ltd and declared the regularisation of services of 532 civic workers in the department.

Speaking at the Platinum Jubilee celebrations of the Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Employees' Association, the CM lauded the power corporation employees for their service and underscored State's legacy in the electricity sector. "Karnataka was the first in Asia to produce electricity in 1902, launched its first supply company in Bengaluru in 1905, and supplied power to the Mysore Palace by 1908".

He noted that the State now generates 34,000 megawatts, with plans to scale it to 60,000 megawatts, to ensure at least seven hours of daytime power supply to farmers.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who also spoke at the event, asserted that the Congress will not permit the privatisation of Electricity Supply Companies (ESCOMs) as long as it remains in power.

He claimed that there was significant pressure from the Centre during his earlier tenure as the Energy Minister, especially after the BJP government privatised ESCOMs in Mumbai, Delhi, and other cities. However, he said he resisted the pressure.

"When I took over, the Transmission and Distribution (T&D) loss stood at 19–20 per cent. We brought it down to 10 per cent, which is now a benchmark," he said, noting that most states report losses of 17–18 per cent.

—*Salar News with Agencies*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy CM DK Shivakumar and others during the inauguration of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the Karnataka Electricity Transmission Corporation Employees' Association, in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

TOO YOUNG TO POLICE?

Members of State Students Association demand an increase in the age limit for the post of police constables, and immediate release of the list of candidates eligible for interview connected with Apex Bank recruitment during their protest at Freedom Park, in Bengaluru, on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

DEATH TRAP ON ROADS

Construction on JC Road, resulting in a slow, chaotic flow of traffic. Despite glaring infrastructure problems in the City, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said that he had personally inspected the progress of white toppings. He said the upcoming Greater Bengaluru Authority would be 'building a City of tomorrow' **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Kolar district seeks mango processing plant

KOLAR, 18 JUNE

In the backdrop of falling procurement prices for mango, the Kolar district administration has written to State Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB) seeking to earmark lands to set up food processing units especially for tomato and mangoes.

In a letter written to Mahesh, Chief Executive Officer of KIADB, Kolar Deputy Commissioner MR Ravi said that farmers of Srinivasapur and Mulabgal taluks grow mango, tomato, tamarind in abundance and if the produce is marketed without being processed, the farmers will suffer losses.

He said that there are ample opportunities for development of industrial areas in Mulbagal and Srinivasapur taluk. He noted that Bengaluru-Chennai Expressway passes through Mulbal taluk and many industries have come up in areas in neighbouring Andhrapradesh.

Meanwhile, two legislators of Kolar district, belonging to JD(S) Samurudhi Manjunath and GK Venkatashiva Reddy staged a dharana in front of Mahatma Gandhi statue near the Vidhana Soudha in City seeking a minimum support price for mangoes grown in Kolar and Chikkaballapur districts. —*Salar News*

Olive Ridley hatching rate rises to 74% on M'luru coast

MANGALURU, 18 JUNE

Conservation efforts to protect Olive Ridley turtles along the Mangaluru coastline have shown notable improvement this nesting season, with forest officials reporting a 74 per cent hatching success rate -- a significant increase from last year's 50.3 per cent.

Mangaluru Division Deputy Conservator of Forests Anthony S Mariyappa said, 2,490 eggs were recorded across 24 nesting sites this season, resulting in the successful release of 1,842 hatchlings into the Arabian Sea.

Nesting activity was documented across several coastal locations, with eight nests at Sasihithlu, 13 at Idya Beach, and one each at Bengre, Tannir Bhavi, and Panambur. The previous season saw 21 nests across beaches such as Sasihithlu, Bengre, Idya, and Chitrapura, with 985 hatchlings from 1,958 eggs. —*PTI*

YOUTH, SWEPT BY CURRENTS, DROWNS IN BHIMA RIVER

KALABURAGI, 18 JUNE

A family was swept away by strong currents while taking a holy dip in the Bhima River in Ganagapur, Kalaburagi, resulting in death of minor. The incident occurred on Monday at around 3.30pm.

17-year-old Lakshmikant Parashurama, from Khajuri village Aland Taluk, had come with his family to visit the Dattatreya Swamy temple in Ganagapur, Afzalpur taluk. Along with his family, entered the river for a dip. Due to strong current, they were swept away. Locals managed to rescue three but were unable to save Lakshmikant.

"While bathing, my son went slightly deeper into the river and got caught in a whirlpool," Raju Parashurama said. "By the time I reached to hold him, he had already drowned. Since then, local fishermen & fire department have been searching, on Tuesday at noon body was found floating near Papnashi area." —*Salar News*

KRS dam may reach maximum level in a week

KRS dam could reach its maximum level in around a week, given its current storage level & inflow. Water level reached 113ft against a maximum level of 124.8ft & holds 35.118 TMC.

10-HR WORK DAY

Unions hit back at bid to increase work hrs

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Several trade unions on Wednesday strongly opposed the State's government's alleged move to extend daily working hours in certain sectors, including IT. The State government had proposed to bring an amendment to the Karnataka Shops and Commercial Establishment Act, 1961, to increase the daily working hours to 10 from the current nine hours, besides allowing more overtime hours.

The State Labour Department on Wednesday convened a meeting with the industry representatives and trade union leaders to discuss a proposed amendment to the Karnataka Shops and Commercial Establishments Act, which reportedly seeks to increase the daily working hours to twelve.

State IT/ITeS Employees Union (KITU) said it opposed the proposal, calling it a form of "modern-day slavery".

It appealed to all employees across the sector to unite and resist the proposed changes, which it claims would gravely impact work-life balance and job security. KITU leaders Suhas Adiga and Lenil Babu were in the meeting.

KITU alleged that the proposed amendment would legalise 12-hour shifts and facilitate a two-shift system, potentially eliminating one-third of the workforce.

KITU charged that this move prioritises corporate profits over employee welfare and undermines workers' fundamental rights.

"The government is attempting to normalise inhuman conditions. This amendment is not about productivity—it's about pleasing corporate bosses by turning human beings into machines," Adiga alleged.

KITU cited the "State Emotional Wellbeing Report 2024," which found that 90 per cent of corporate employees under 25 suffer from anxiety. —*PTI*

2 youths, NSUI VP killed in road mishap in Mangaluru

MANGALURU, 18 JUNE

Two youths, including prominent National Students' Union of India (NSUI) leader Omshri Pujari, were killed in a tragic road accident late Tuesday night on National Highway 66, near Jeppinamogaru. The other victim, Aman Rao, was a resident of Kadri in Mangaluru.

Reports suggest the car was travelling at high speed when the driver lost control and collided with a road divider. The group was en route from Talapady to Mangaluru.

In addition to the fatalities, two other occupants, Vamshi and Ashiq, sustained serious injuries and are currently receiving treatment in the ICU at a local hospital. A fourth passenger, Italian national Jerry, suffered only minor injuries.

Both deceased were affiliated with the Congress party. Police confirmed that Omshri and Aman unfortunately succumbed to their injuries before reaching the hospital. Eyewitnesses reported that the vehicle was speeding towards Mangaluru from Tokottu when the accident occurred.

A case has been registered at the Mangaluru South Traffic Police Station, and an investigation into the incident is ongoing.

—*Salar News with agencies*

Taking terror lightly is betrayal of humanity: PM

Modi urges G7 leaders to act against Pakistan for its support to cross-border terrorist activities

KANANASKIS, 18 JUNE

India's neighbourhood has become a breeding ground for terrorism and turning a blind eye towards the challenge would be a "betrayal of humanity", Prime Minister Narendra Modi told G7 leaders, seeking action against Pakistan for its support to cross-border terrorist activities.

In an address at a G7 outreach session here, Modi said the April 22 Pahalgam attack was a direct attack on the "soul, identity, and dignity" of every Indian, adding any country that supports terrorism must be held accountable and made to pay the price.

There must be no place for "double standards" in dealing with terrorism, he said and questioned whether those spreading terror and those who suffer from it be "weighed on the same scale."

Modi, who is here to attend the G7 Summit, Tuesday said he had a "very good meeting" with South Korean President Lee Jae-myung focusing collaboration on sectors like commerce, investment, technology, green hydrogen, shipbuilding and more.

Modi had talks with French President Emmanuel Macron and UK PM Keir Starmer, Modi emphasized strengthening ties in trade and commerce.

He also met Italian PM Giorgia Meloni, who said Italy and India are linked by a great friendship.

Modi also met with Mexico President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo for the first meeting between the two leaders and thanked for the support extended by Mexico in India's fight against terrorism, the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.

He also met with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and discussed ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation in key areas.

The PM also met with his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese, President Ramaphosa of South Africa, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba.

Modi was earlier welcomed by his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney upon his arrival. This is Modi's first visit to Canada in a decade. —*PTI*

In a light-hearted moment at the G7 Summit in Canada, PM Narendra Modi teased French President Emmanuel Macron over his online spat with US Prez Donald Trump. Hugging Macron, Modi quipped, 'Nowadays you are very active on Twitter', prompting laughter from both leaders ***PHOTO: ANI***

> **This is a triple jhatka for Indian diplomacy. Today Field Marshal Munir, whose incendiary, inflammatory, provocative and unacceptable remarks formed the background to the Pahalgam terror attack, is set to have lunch with President Trump. This is a huge setback**
>
> –Jairam Ramesh, Congress General Secretary In-charge

US Prez to host Pak Army Chief for lunch

WASHINGTON, 18 JUNE

US President Donald Trump will host Pakistan Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir for lunch at the White House on Wednesday at 1 pm (local time), marking a significant moment in US-Pakistan military ties.

Islamabad has hailed the White House invitation as a major diplomatic win. Munir, recently elevated to Pakistan's rare five-star rank—the first since Ayub Khan in 1959—is in Washington to discuss regional security and counterterrorism cooperation.

During his visit, Munir urged India to engage with Pakistan "as a civilised nation" rather than attempt to impose "regional hegemony." He denied Pakistan's involvement in the Pahalgam terror attack and criticised India's "new normal" of violating international borders.

Tensions flared after India conducted strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on 7 May, in response to the Pahalgam attack. Hostilities ceased on 10 May after talks between the two nations' military leadership. Munir faced protests outside his Washington hotel, where demonstrators, including Pakistani nationals, called for the restoration of "unfettered democracy" in Pakistan, shouting slogans such as "mass murderer" and "dictator."

On regional matters, Munir expressed Pakistan's support for Iran in its war with Israel, while backing US de-escalation efforts.

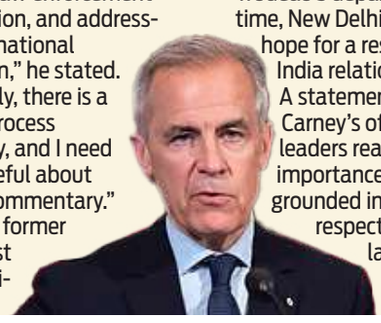
A key highlight of the visit is Pakistan's strengthened counterterrorism collaboration with the US, particularly against ISIS-K. Gen Michael Kurilla, head of US Central Command, described Pakistan as a "phenomenal partner" in the fight against ISIS-K, praising Islamabad's operations. —*PTI*

CARNEY URGES CAUTION ON NIJJAR CASE AS TIES IMPROVE

KANANASKIS, 18 JUNE

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has urged caution regarding the investigation into the killing of pro-Khalistani Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, citing an ongoing judicial process.

Speaking after a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the G7 Summit, Carney confirmed the matter was discussed. "We have had a discussion... about the importance of law enforcement to law enforcement cooperation, and addressing transnational repression," he stated. "Obviously, there is a judicial process underway, and I need to be careful about further commentary."



Carney, a former economist and political newcomer, assumed office in March following Justin Trudeau's departure. At the time, New Delhi expressed hope for a reset in Canada-India relations.

A statement from Carney's office said both leaders reaffirmed the importance of ties grounded in mutual respect, the rule of law, and sovereignty. They agreed to appoint new high commissioners, aiming to restore regular consular services for citizens and businesses.

Carney also raised key G7 priorities, including transnational crime, repression, and the rules-based international order. Discussions also covered enhancing cooperation in technology, the digital transition, food security, and critical minerals. —*PTI*

AIR INDIA PLANE CRASH

208 victims identified; 170 bodies returned to families

AHMEDABAD, 18 JUNE

Authorities have identified 208 victims of last week's Air India flight AI-171 crash in Ahmedabad through DNA testing, with 170 bodies—including those of 32 foreign nationals—returned to their families. The London-bound Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner, carrying 242 passengers and crew, crashed shortly after take-off from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport on 12 June, killing all but one on board, along with 29 people on the ground, when the aircraft struck a medical complex.

Dr Rakesh Joshi, Superintendent of Ahmedabad Civil Hospital, confirmed the deceased included 127 Indians, 27 British nationals, four Portuguese nationals, and one Canadian. Of the Indian victims, four were on the ground, while the rest were passengers. DNA matching efforts continue for the remaining victims, many of whom were severely burnt or disfigured.

The sole survivor, Vishwas Kumar Ramesh, a 40-year-old British businessman from Leicester, was discharged from hospital on Tuesday evening. His brother, Ajay, who was travelling with him, was among the deceased. His remains were handed over following DNA confirmation, and cremated in their hometown of Diu, with Vishwas in attendance. A video circulated on social media shows Vishwas carrying his brother's body during the final rites.

Vishwas recalled that his seat 11A, near the emergency exit, fell onto the hostel's ground floor during the crash, allowing him to escape. He was later seen walking towards an ambulance in a video taken by a bystander.

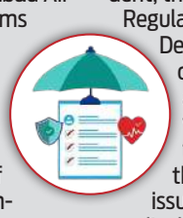
Seventy-one others were injured, with 15 still in hospital. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited Vishwas the day after the crash. —*PTI*

Vishwas Kumar Ramesh, the sole survivor of the Air India plane crash, was discharged from the Ahmedabad Civil Hospital following his recovery on Tuesday, and he later attended the cremation of his deceased brother in Diu who was flying with him on the same aircraft ***PHOTO: PTI***

Insurers in a fix as both insured, nominees are among dead

Insurance companies are facing challenges in settling claims of the Ahmedabad Air India plane crash victims last week – in many cases, both the policyholders and nominees died in the tragedy.

There are instances of an entire family perishing or one of the spouses dying, which claimed the lives of 241 persons on board and 29 on the ground.



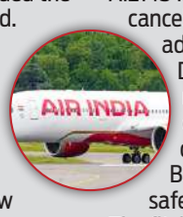
Immediately after the accident, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India asked insurance companies to verify the details of the deceased with their database on issuance of the overseas medical insurance, personal accident and life insurance policies. —*PTI*

Multiple snags force AI cancel three international flights

Air India has cancelled three of its international flights on Wednesday owing to various reasons, including maintenance and technical issues.

Two of these flights were cancelled after the passengers had already boarded the aircraft, the airline said.

The airline said it had to cancel its Toronto-Delhi flight AI188 of 18 June due to extended maintenance and consequently operating crew coming under regulatory flight duty time limitation norms.



Passengers, who had already boarded the aircraft, were disembarked following cancellation of the flight, it said.

Also, flight AI996 from Dubai to Delhi on 18 June, 2025 was cancelled due to technical reasons and passengers were disembarked after boarding, as per Air India.

However, the airline's flight AI2145 from Delhi to Bali was cancelled after it was advised to return to Delhi mid-way due to reports of volcanic eruption near the destination airport Bali, in the interest of safety, Air India stated.

The flight safely landed back in Delhi and all passengers were disembarked.

Air India said its teams on the ground are making alternative arrangements for the passengers. —*PTI*

Man recovers 70 tolas of gold, cash from crash site

Rajesh Patel, 57, was among the first responders to the Air India plane crash in Ahmedabad on 12 June. Living just 300 metres from the site, he rushed in an ambulance linked to a hospital run by a relative. Though unable to approach the crash zone for 20 minutes due to intense flames, Patel and fellow volunteers used sarees, bedsheets, and sacks to carry the injured and dead once the fire was contained.

After rescue efforts, Patel sifted through the wreckage, recovering nearly 70 tolas of gold, Rs 50,000, US dollars, silver items, passports, and a Bhagavad Gita from burnt luggage.

He handed all valuables to police at the scene.

Having volunteered during the 2008 Ahmedabad blasts, Patel said he acted from a sense of duty. Police are cataloguing recovered belongings, to be returned to victims' families after verification. Gujarat's Minister of State for Home assured that all recovered items will be returned, commending the police's integrity and public service. —*PTI*

DMK warns of Parl protest over Keeladi ASI report

MADURAI, 18 JUNE

The ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu has vowed to disrupt the upcoming monsoon session of Parliament unless the Union government releases the ASI's report on the Keeladi excavations in Sivaganga district.

Speaking at a DMK youth wing protest, Rajya Sabha MP Tiruchi Siva accused the BJP-led Centre of waging a "cultural and ideological war" by suppressing findings that point to an ancient urban Tamil civilisation. "Why is the Centre declining to accept that report?" he asked, alleging a "cultural invasion" targeting the Dravidian movement.

Siva also claimed that ASI official K. Amarnath Ramakrishna, who led the Keeladi excavations, was transferred as an act of political vengeance. The Centre reportedly asked Ramakrishna to revise his original report submitted two years ago, which he refused, asserting it followed scientific standards.

With the monsoon session expected next month, Siva warned, "Keeladi will be the first matter we raise. If you don't release the report, we will not allow Parliament to function."

Parallel protests were held by the Dravidar Kazhagam and VCK in Chennai, where leaders accused the Centre of distorting history and demanded recognition of Keeladi's findings, backed by AMS carbon dating and established research methodology. —*PTI*

LEAVES WINDOW TO OPT OUT

M'rashtra mandates Hindi as 3rd language in schools

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

The Maharashtra government has issued an order saying Hindi will be taught as the third language to students in Marathi and English medium schools in the state from classes 1 to 5.

An amended government order issued on Tuesday said Hindi will "generally" be the third language, instead of being mandatory, but gave an option to opt out if 20 students per grade in a school express the desire to study any Indian language other than Hindi.

While some Marathi language advocates accused the government of reintroducing the policy through the "backdoor" after initially backtracking, the opposition Congress accused Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis of "stabbing" the Marathi people in the chest.

The Maharashtra School Education Department issued the government resolution (GR) on Tuesday as part of the implementation of the 'State Curriculum Framework for School Education 2024', aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

According to the GR, Hindi will "generally" be the third language for students from classes 1 to 5 in Marathi and English medium schools.

Marathi will be a compulsory language in all medium schools, the GR said.

Though the government order provides a conditional option for students to opt for another Indian language instead of Hindi, it stipulates that a minimum of 20 students per school must opt for the alternative.

If a such demand arises, either a teacher will be appointed or the language will be taught online, the order added.

The directive also mandates that in schools following other mediums of instruction, the three-language formula must include the medium language, Marathi and English.

On 22 April, Bhuse said Hindi would no longer be compulsory in classes 1 to 5.

Last month, the minister at an event in Pune said, "The decision to introduce Hindi from class 1 as a third language was taken earlier. However, many parents have suggested it be introduced from class 3 instead. We will consider these suggestions before taking any further decision."

He also said at the time that the three-language formula was "on hold" and schools would continue with the existing two-language system for now.

But the latest order appears to contradict that assurance, prompting a fresh wave of opposition. —*PTI*

PHOTO: CHATGPT AI

Bypolls in 5 seats of 4 states to be held today

NEW DELIHI, 18 JUNE

Polling is set to begin at 7am on 19 June for by-elections to five Assembly seats across Punjab, West Bengal, Gujarat, and Kerala. These will be the first elections held under Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, who took office in February. Results will be declared on 23 June.

Though limited in scale, the bypolls are politically significant for both the ruling NDA and the Opposition.

In Punjab's Ludhiana (West), the AAP is aiming to retain the seat following the death of MLA Gurpreet Singh Gogi. The party has fielded Rajya Sabha MP Sanjeev Arora. A win could open a Rajya Sabha berth for former Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal.

In West Bengal's Kaliganj, TMC has nominated Alifa Ahmed, daughter of the late MLA. The BJP and Congress-Left alliance have also fielded candidates, making it a key test ahead of the 2026 Assembly election.

In Gujarat, bypolls in Kadi and Visavadar are shaping into triangular contests involving the BJP, Congress, and AAP.

In Kerala's Nilambur, the Congress hopes to regain its stronghold with Aryadan Shoukath, while the LDF fields M Swaraj after PV Anvar's resignation. —*Agencies*

SC raps HC, tells TN to reinstate top cop

SC terms suspension shocking, demoralising; Says cop cooperated in kidnapping case

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The Supreme Court on Wednesday questioned the Tamil Nadu government over additional director general of police, HM Jayaram's suspension and ordered that he be reinstated as he cooperated with investigation.

The Madras High Court had ordered his arrest while hearing an anticipatory bail application filed by Puthiya Bharatham Katchi MLA M Jagan Moorthy, who apprehended arrest in a kidnapping case in which a girl ran away with a boy.

A bench of Justices Ujjal Bhuyan and Manmohan was informed by the state government's counsel that the officer had been taken into custody and released on 17 June.

The Supreme Court asked the Tamil Nadu government to reinstate senior cop, HM Jayaram as he cooperated with the investigation **PHOTO: PTI**

Jayaram's counsel submitted that he was released by the police, but the government had suspended him.

The bench questioned the Tamil Nadu government for suspending him, terming such orders as shocking and demoralising.

The government counsel was asked to seek instructions on the matter and appear on 19 June for revoking his suspension.

Jayaram's plea said that the high court directive was passed without "assigning any detailed reasons" while relying upon the purported statements of two accused persons.

The high court's direction overlooked the fact that he is a serving as an additional director general of police and an IPS officer with 28 years' of experience, the plea argued.

The high court orally directed Tamil Nadu Police to take Jayaram in custody.

Jayaram was detained after he came out of the court building.

Moorthy and Jayaram, whose car was allegedly used in the kidnapping, were summoned to appear before the court on 16 June. —*PTI*

Kerala journalist gets bail in defamation case

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Nandakumar **PHOTO: X**

The Supreme Court on Wednesday granted interim bail to a Kerala journalist booked for allegedly publishing a defamatory video against a woman politician on his YouTube channel 'Crime Online.'

A bench issued notice to the Kerala government and the station house officer of the police station concerned on journalist Nandakumar TP's anticipatory bail plea.

The trial court will release him on bail upon a bond and sureties as directed by the judge.

The Kerala High Court declined to grant Nandakumar anticipatory bail. —*PTI*

13 die of diarrhoea in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, 18 JUNE

The death toll from a diarrhoea outbreak in Jajpur district, Odisha, has reached 13 following two more fatalities in the Vyasanagar area. The latest victims were admitted in critical condition, suffering from severe dehydration, and died shortly after arriving at the hospital. Currently, 196 patients are receiving treatment across various hospitals, with 37 new cases recorded in just one day. 16 people tested positive for cholera. The outbreak, which began on 9 June, spread to other districts, prompting state authorities to alert local collectors to implement preventative measures. Municipal authorities in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack inspected food stalls and water supply units to ensure quality control in response to this public health crisis.—*PTI*

3 Maoists killed in Andhra Pradesh

RAMPACHODAVARAM, 18 JUNE

On Wednesday morning, three armed Maoists were shot dead during a police combing operation in Andhra Pradesh's Alluri Sitharamaraju district. The operation was launched following credible intelligence reports indicating Maoist activity in the region. Superintendent of Police Amit Bardar confirmed the fatalities, stating that the identities of the deceased are still being investigated. The bodies of the Maoists were yet to be recovered. In the wake of the encounter, police have ramped up surveillance in tribal areas to locate and address any remaining Maoist threats. Authorities are continuing their investigations to better understand the incident and the presence of Maoist groups in the locality.—*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Patna HC dismisses summons against MoS Nityanand Rai

PATNA, 18 JUNE

The Patna High Court has quashed a summons against Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai connected to an alleged inflammatory speech made during a 2018 election campaign. Justice Chandra Shekhar Jha ruled that the lower court's summons issued in April 2022 was unwarranted, determining that Rai's comments did not incite malice or harm any religious sentiments. The case stemmed from an FIR lodged against Rai while he was the state BJP president during the Araria Lok Sabha bypoll, where he suggested that a victory for the opposition could turn Araria into a base for ISIS. The court's ruling highlighted that the speech's content did not warrant legal action.—*PTI*

Odisha girl found hanging on tree, rape suspected

KEONJHAR, 18 JUNE

A 17-year-old girl's body has been found hanging from a tree in Odisha's Keonjhar district after she went missing while stepping out of her home. Her family suspects she was gang-raped and murdered. The grim discovery followed her disappearance on Monday night, with police stating her mobile phone was switched off at the time. The girl's bloodstained body was discovered the next morning, alongside evidence suggesting foul play. Following protests from local villagers, police have registered a case of gang rape and murder, detaining two suspects. The girl's father alleges she was hanged to disguise the crime as a suicide. Authorities are conducting thorough investigations, with autopsy results expected to clarify circumstances surrounding her tragic death. —*PTI*

NASA puts off Axiom-4 mission to 22 June

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla's Axiom-4 mission to the International Space Station has been postponed to 22 June, to allow NASA to evaluate the operations on the orbital lab after the recent repairs in the Russian section, Axiom Space announced on Wednesday.

The Axiom-4 mission, which marks the return to space for India, Hungary and Poland, was earlier scheduled for lift-off from NASA's Kennedy Space Centre in Florida on 19 June onboard SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket.

"NASA, Axiom Space and SpaceX are now targeting no earlier than Sunday, 22 June, for launch of the fourth private astronaut mission to the International Space Station, Axiom Mission 4," Axiom Space said.

The change provides NASA time to continue evaluating space station operations after recent repair work in the aft (back) most segment of the International Space Station's Zvezda service module.

The Axiom-4 mission is led by Commander Peggy Whitson, with Shukla as mission pilot. Hungarian astronaut Tibor Kapu and Poland's Slawosz Uznanski-Wisniewski are mission specialists. The #Ax4 crew remained in quarantine in Florida to maintain all medical and safety protocols. —*PTI*

Rains lash Kerala; orange alert issued

T'PURAM/DELHI/ MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Wednesday issued an orange alert in Kerala's Kannur and Kasaragod districts for the day.

An orange alert was sounded in Alappuzha, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Palakkad and Malappuram districts.

Fishing activities were to be halted along the Kerala-Karnataka-Lakshadweep coasts on Wednesday and 19 June due to possibility of strong winds of speeds.

An orange alert was issued for lightning and thunderstorms in Delhi on Wednesday night.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued an orange alert for rain in the city. The relative humidity at 8.30 am was 82 per cent.

Delhi's minimum temperature was recorded at 28 degrees Celsius, while the maximum was 36 degrees Celsius.

Commuters walk through a street amid rains, in Ranchi **PHOTO: PTI**

Rains have been forecast in Jharkhand till 21 June.

Kuru in Lohardaga district received the highest rainfall at 144mm.

A red alert was issued for several districts, including Bokaro, Dhanbad, Hazaribag, Giridih, and Ranchi.

The scenic Powai Lake in Mumbai with a capacity of 545cr litres overflowed on Wednesday morning following heavy rains in its catchment areas.

Its water is not potable and is used only for industrial purposes.

Steady rainfall over the past two days brought much-needed relief from the intense heat in Haryana and Punjab, resulting in light rains in Chandigarh.

Punjab's Ludhiana, Patiala, Fatehgarh Sahib, Hoshiarpur and Rupnagar witnessed rains. It also rained in Haryana' Ambala, Hisar, Narnaul, Gurugram, Sirsa, and Nuh. —*PTI*

Himachal gets Rs 2,000 cr as flood assistance

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

A high-level committee chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah has approved Rs 2,006.40 crore as central assistance for Himachal Pradesh to aid recovery and reconstruction following the severe floods, landslides, and cloudbursts of 2023. The committee evaluated the proposal for financial support from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF).

Of the total allocation, Rs 1,504.80 crore will be provided as the central share for the recovery efforts. An additional Rs 633.73 crore was approved by the Home Ministry in 2023.

In 2024-25, Rs 20,264.40 crore was allocated to 28 states via the State Disaster Response Fund, as support for disaster management and mitigation across the country. —*PTI*

Delhi spent only 1/3 of funds received to fight air pollution

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Delhi, notorious for its air pollution, has reportedly utilised less than one-third of the funds allocated to it under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP). Since the programme's inception in 2019, Delhi spent merely Rs 13.94 crore, equating to just 32.65 per cent of the Rs 42.69 crore earmarked for air quality initiatives.

The NCAP aims to cut PM10 pollution by 40 per cent in India's 130 most polluted cities by 2026, using 2019-20 as the base year. Alarmingly, 14 other cities and urban agglomerations h also spent less than half of their allocated funds, including Noida, which has utilised only Rs 3.44 crore of its Rs 30.89 crore funding.

Faridabad in Haryana managed to spend Rs 28.60 crore of its Rs 107.14 crore allocation, while Visakhapatnam used Rs 39.42 crore out of Rs 129.25 crore. 71 per cent of the total Rs 12,636 crore allocated to the 130 cities were spent as of lMay, indicating significant underutilisation of funds aimed at improving air quality across the nation. —*PTI*

2 from J&K killed in landslide on Kedarnath route

RUDRAPRAYAG, 18 JUNE

Two palanquin carriers from Jammu and Kashmir were killed, while three others, including a pilgrim from Gujarat, were injured in a landslide on the trekking route to the Kedarnath shrine in Uttarakhand on Wednesday . The deceased were identified as Nitin Kumar and Chandrashekhar, both hailing from Jammu and Kashmir's Doda. The injured victims include Sandeep Kumar and Nitin Manhas and Akash Chitriya.

The landslide struck at 11.20am near Junglechatti Ghat, sending boulders tumbling down the hillside and impacting pilgrims, palanquins, and porters. The victims fell into a gorge as a result of the rubble's force. The police and disasater response personnel conducted search and rescue operations.

Recovery efforts faced difficulties as rescuers employed ropes to retrieve the deceased and injured from the gorge. The seriously injured have been taken to a health centre in Gaurikund, while pilgrim movement was allowed to continue along the route under police protection. —*PTI*

The sinking MSC Elsa 3 **PHOTO: X/ IndiaCoastGuard**

Rains delay oil extraction from sunken ship

KOCHI, 18 JUNE

- The present weather conditions provide only a "narrow and fragmented working window", which is not suitable for "stable and safe" oil extraction.

The Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) on Wednesday said that due to the prevailing peak monsoon conditions and associated operational risks, it would take more time to extract oil from the Liberian-flagged ship MSC Elsa 3 that sank off the Kerala coast in May.

The present weather conditions provide only a "narrow and fragmented working window", which is unsuitable for "stable and safe" oil extraction.

The vessel Nand Saarthi – from where saturation diving operations for oil extraction were to be conducted – remains at Kochi port due to prevailing adverse sea conditions.

Oil recovery equipment onboard Nand Saarthi will transferred to Canara Megh. All accessories and gases remain available.

The SEAMAC III vessel, from which the divers had worked to plug the oil leaks, was demobilised and proceeding to Mumbai.

Meanwhile, the blaze aboard the Singapore-flagged cargo ship MV Wan Hai 503, was partially contained.

Flames and smoke intensityreduced across most zones of the vessel.

Its history of internal flare-ups and adverse weather were matters of concern. —*PTI*

9-yr-old boy sees mom, her lover suffocate dad to death with pillows

ALWAR, 18 JUNE

A nine-year-old boy has become the key witness in the murder of his father in Kherli, Alwar (Rajasthan), on the night of 7 June. The victim, Veeru alias Man Singh Jatav, was allegedly killed by his wife Anita, her lover Kashiram Prajapat, and four hired contract killers.

Anita initially claimed Veeru died of sudden illness. However, their son later told police he had witnessed everything while pretending to sleep. According to his account, Anita deliberately left the main gate open. Around midnight, Kashiram—whom the boy referred to as "Kashi Uncle"—entered with four others. They attacked Veeru as he slept, suffocating him with a pillow.

The boy said Kashiram threatened him into silence. Suspicious injuries, including a broken tooth and signs of assault, led to a post-mortem confirming murder.

Police arrested Anita, Kashiram, and one killer, Brijesh Jatav. Three suspects remain at large. CCTV footage and call data revealed the affair and Rs 2 lakh murder plot. The child's brave testimony helped expose the crime. —*Agencies*

Telangana to roll out cow protection policy

HYDERABAD, 18 JUNE

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has directed officials to draft a comprehensive policy for cow protection in the state. A three-member committee has been formed, comprising Special Chief Secretary (Animal Husbandry) Sabyasachi Ghosh, Principal Secretary (Endowments) Shailaja Ramaiyar, and Agriculture Secretary Raghunandan Rao. The panel will study the establishment of goshalas (cow shelters) and review similar policies in other states.

During a meeting with Animal Husbandry Minister Vakiti Srihari, the Chief Minister expressed concern over cows donated by devotees dying due to overcrowding and poor conditions in shelters. Emphasising the cultural and devotional importance of cows, he instructed officials to set up modern goshalas in four locations: Vemulawada, Yadagirigutta, Yenkepally near Hyderabad, and at the Animal Husbandry University.

A 100-acre cow shelter will be developed at Vemulawada, where the Kode Mokku ritual is practised. The government is willing to spend generously to ensure the proper care and protection of cows. —*PTI*

ED conducts raids in Rs 2,000cr 'classroom' scam

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday searched multiple premises in Delhi as part of an investigation into the classroom construction 'scam' alleged to have taken place during the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government.

The ED conducted the raids after registering a criminal case, taking cognisance of a Delhi Anti-corruption Bureau FIR into the said allegations.

37 premises of contractors and private entities were covered by the ED officials. The ACB had booked former ministers, Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain based on the complaint, which alleged that financial irregularities to the tune of Rs 2,000 crore were done in the construction of over 12,000 classrooms. —*PTI*

GREEN INDIA MISSION

Aravallis, Himalayas, Western Ghats's ecosystems to be restored

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The government on Tuesday unveiled an updated National Mission for Green India to restore degraded forest ecosystems in the Western Ghats, the Himalayas and the Aravalli mountain range.

The updated mission document focused on greening the arid regions of northwest India.

The mission aimed at improving ecosystem services in 10 million hectares of land, increase forest-based livelihoods of three million households and enhance Co2 sequestration by 50 to 60 MT.

The mission would work towards creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent by 2030 and restore the ecologically critical Aravalli hills, stretching from Gujarat to Delhi..

The mission will restore and protect the Western Ghats and Himalayan slope. —*PTI*

DESTROYED

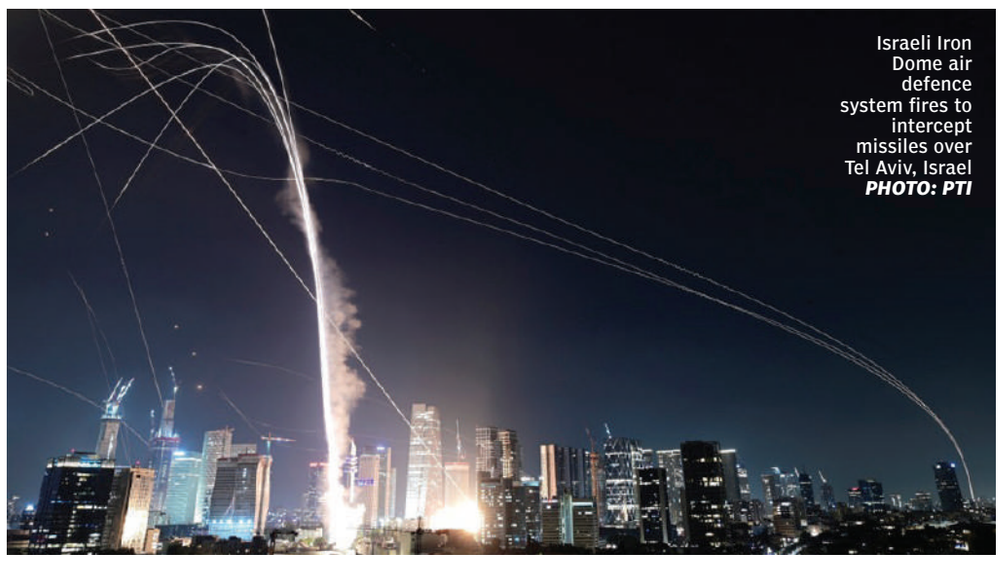
This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows damage after Israeli airstrikes destroyed buildings at an Iranian missile base near Tabriz, Iran
PHOTO: PTI

Israel's missile defence is more than just Iron Dome

As tensions between Israel and Iran escalate into open conflict, attention has turned once more to Israel's vaunted air defence systems. Late last week, under the banner of Operation Rising Lion, Israel launched a series of strikes targeting Iran's nuclear programme and its long-range missile capabilities. Citing intelligence that Iran was close to producing nine nuclear weapons, Israel initiated a campaign that included attacks on nuclear facilities and the assassination of key Iranian military figures and scientists.

In retaliation, Iran launched a massive wave of ballistic missiles and drones towards Israeli population centres including Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The first wave reportedly included around 200 ballistic missiles and an equal number of drones.

While Israel's defences have intercepted the majority of incoming threats, concerns remain over how long such protection can be sustained, and what comes next in this dangerous escalation.



Israeli Iron Dome air defence system fires to intercept missiles over Tel Aviv, Israel
PHOTO: PTI

Ballistic missiles and drones

Iran's long-range strike arsenal includes a mix of ballistic and cruise missiles, along with drones. Ballistic missiles, which rely on gravity to follow a fixed arc-like trajectory, differ from cruise missiles, which can be manoeuvred mid-flight. Iran's distance from Israel – approximately 1,000 km – means that medium-range ballistic missiles are the primary threat. Among these are suspected types like the Emad and Fattah-1.

Ballistic missiles are notoriously difficult to intercept. They travel at extremely high speeds and arrive with very short warning. The longer the range, the higher and faster they fly, shrinking the defender's window to respond. Even with advanced systems, these incoming weapons are fast, small targets that test the limits of any air defence.

Israel's layered defence

While the Iron Dome is widely known, it is only one part of a sophisticated, multi-layered air defence system. Designed for short-range threats like artillery shells and rockets, Iron Dome uses radar detection, command and control algorithms, and surface-to-air interceptors to identify and neutralise incoming threats. It is extremely effective against short-range projectiles commonly used by militant groups like Hamas or Hezbollah.

However, to counter threats like those launched by Iran, Israel relies on deeper layers in its defensive architecture. These include the David's Sling, Arrow 2, and Arrow 3 systems:

- David's Sling fills the gap between Iron Dome and long-range interceptors, targeting medium- to long-range missiles.
- Arrow 2 is capable of intercepting ballistic missiles within the atmosphere.
- Arrow 3 is designed for exoatmospheric interception—destroying threats outside the Earth's atmosphere, including during the upper phase of their trajectory.

Recent footage has shown what are believed to be Arrow 3 intercepts occurring high above the atmosphere, underlining Israel's significant capacity to counter advanced missile threats.

International support

The United States, Israel's key defence partner, has deployed Aegis-equipped warships to assist with missile interception. The Aegis system, together with the SM-3 and SM-6 interceptors, is analogous to Israel's Arrow and David's Sling systems. The US Army also employs Patriot PAC-3 and THAAD systems, comparable in purpose to Israel's own long-range capabilities.

Iran, by contrast, has more limited options for air and missile defence. It possesses Russian-made S-300 systems, which offer basic ballistic missile interception capability—primarily for short-range threats. However, the current Israeli campaign includes efforts to degrade Iran's air defence network, making it unclear how many of these systems remain operational.

Iran is reportedly developing manoeuvrable missile warheads designed to evade missile defence systems. While potentially a serious threat, there is no clear evidence these warheads are yet operational.

The limits of missile defence

Despite their sophistication, missile defences are not foolproof and are inherently finite. Every incoming missile requires at least one—and often two—interceptors to guarantee its destruction. As a result, defenders may quickly exhaust their stockpiles during sustained attacks.

Attackers, while also constrained by supply limits, usually require fewer launches to make an impact. A single missile that evades interception can cause devastating damage, especially if it carries a large explosive payload or, in worst-case scenarios, a nuclear warhead.

Recent reports suggest Iran has already fired around 1,000 of its estimated 3,000 ballistic missiles. However, it is unknown how quickly it can replenish these stocks. On the other side, Israel—and its allies—must consider how long interceptor supplies can last under repeated attack.

The road ahead

Israel's air defences remain robust for now, but attrition is a growing concern. As both sides expend their stockpiles, the effectiveness of defence systems could wane.

The longer the conflict continues, the more likely it is to turn into a race of attrition between offensive and defensive capabilities. *—PTI*

SALAR سالار

US moves over 30 jets, ships to Middle East

The US is shifting military aircraft and warships into and around the Middle East to protect Israel from Iranian attacks as President Donald Trump warns Tehran to step back from the conflict.

Trump's social media posts saying his patience with Iran was "wearing thin" have raised the possibility of deepening US involvement, perhaps by using its bunker-busting bomb to strike a key Iranian nuclear site built deep underground in the mountains.

Israel doesn't have the massive munition it would take to destroy the Fordo nuclear fuel enrichment plant, or the aircraft needed to deliver it. Only the US does.

As America's national security leaders discuss the next steps, the Pentagon has moved to ensure that its troops and bases in the region are protected. *—PTI*

HERE'S A LOOK AT THE US MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST:

US aircraft moving to the Middle East

In a social media post, Trump warned that "we now have complete and total control of the skies over Iran."

US officials insisted as of Tuesday that the American military has not taken any offensive actions against Iran, only defensive strikes to take out incoming Iranian missiles to protect Israel.

Additional US fighter jets and refuelling tankers have been deployed to the region, but officials have declined to provide specific numbers. Fighter jets have joined in launching strikes to defend Israel, but officials said Tuesday that no American aircraft were over Iran.

Aurora Intel, a group that reviews open source information in real time in the Middle East, said the US Air Force had put additional refueling aircraft and fighter jets in strategic locations across Europe, including England, Spain, Germany and Greece. The information was obtained from public aviation tracking websites.

US fighter jets have been patrolling the skies around the Middle East to protect personnel and installations, and bases in the region are on heightened alert and are taking additional security precautions, the officials said. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth has not provided any details, but said on Fox News Channel late Monday that the military movements were to "ensure that our people are safe."

Warships taking out Iranian missiles and ready to protect US bases

American warships also are shooting down Iranian ballistic missiles targeting Israel, with the USS The Sullivans and the USS Arleigh Burke launching strikes over the weekend.

The Sullivans has been joined in the Eastern Mediterranean by the USS Thomas Hudner this week to continue those defense strikes, while the Arleigh Burke has moved away from the area, according to a US. official.

The USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier is in the Arabian Sea with the four warships in its strike group. They are not participating in the defense of Israel. But they are positioned to provide security for U.S. troops and bases along the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf.

The USS Nimitz has been long scheduled to take over for the Carl Vinson and is heading west from the Indo-Pacific region toward the Middle East. The official said it is slated to arrive in the region by the end of the month, and the two carriers would likely overlap at least for a short time before the Vinson heads home to San Diego.

There also are destroyers in the Red Sea, and others are based in the Western Mediterranean and participating in exercises in the Baltic Sea. *—PTI*

Israeli F-35i and American F-15 jets hold an aerial exercise over Israel ***PHOTO: ISRAEL DEFENCE FORCES***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

What's Uranium enrichment, how is it used for nuclear bombs?

Late last week, Israel targeted three of Iran's key nuclear facilities – Natanz, Isfahan and Fordo, killing several Iranian nuclear scientists. The facilities are heavily fortified and largely underground, and there are conflicting reports of how much damage has been done.

Natanz and Fordo are Iran's uranium enrichment sites, and Isfahan provides the raw materials, so any damage to these sites would limit Iran's ability to produce nuclear weapons.

But what exactly is uranium enrichment and why does it raise concerns?

To understand what it means to "enrich" uranium, you need to know a little about uranium isotopes and about splitting the atom in a nuclear fission reaction.

What is an isotope?

All matter is made of atoms, which in turn are made up of protons, neutrons and electrons. The number of protons is what gives atoms their chemical properties, setting apart the various chemical elements.

Atoms have equal numbers of protons and electrons. Uranium has 92 protons, for example, while carbon has six. However, the same element can have different numbers of neutrons, forming versions of the element called isotopes.

This hardly matters for chemical reactions, but their nuclear reactions can be wildly different.

The difference between uranium-238 and uranium-235

When we dig uranium out of the ground, 99.27 per cent of it is uranium-238, which has 92 protons and 146 neutrons. Only 0.72 per cent of it is uranium-235 with 92 protons and 143 neutrons (the remaining 0.01 per cent are other isotopes).

For nuclear power reactors or weapons, we need to change the isotope proportions. That's because of the two main uranium isotopes, only uranium-235 can support a fission chain reaction: one neutron causes an atom to fission, which produces energy and some more neutrons, causing more fission, and so on.

This chain reaction releases a tremendous amount of energy. In a nuclear weapon, the goal is to have this chain reaction occur in a fraction of a second, producing a nuclear explosion.

In a civilian nuclear power plant, the chain reaction is controlled. Nuclear power plants currently produce 9 per cent of the world's power.

The Natanz Uranium Enrichment Facility was a primary target of Israel. Both the Fuel Enrichment Plant and the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant were struck by air-launched ballistic missiles ***PHOTO: X***

Another vital civilian use of nuclear reactions is for producing isotopes used in nuclear medicine for the diagnosis and treatment of various diseases.

What is uranium enrichment, then?

To "enrich" uranium means taking the naturally found element and increasing the proportion of uranium-235 while removing uranium-238.

There are a few ways to do this (including new inventions from Australia), but commercially, enrichment is currently done with a centrifuge. This is also the case in Iran's facilities.

Centrifuges exploit the fact that uranium-238 is about 1 per cent heavier than uranium-235. They take uranium (in gas form) and use rotors to spin it at 50,000 to 70,000 rotations per minute, with the outer walls of the centrifuges moving at 400 to 500 metres per second.

This works much like a salad spinner that throws water to the sides while the salad leaves stay in the centre. The heavier uranium-238 moves to the edges of the centrifuge, leaving the uranium-235 in the middle.

This is only so effective, so the spinning process is done over and over again, building up the percentage of the uranium-235.

Most civilian nuclear reactors use "low enriched uranium" that's been enriched to between 3 per cent and 5 per cent. This means that 3–5 per cent of the total uranium in the sample is now uranium-235. That's enough to sustain a chain reaction and make electricity.

What level of enrichment do nuclear weapons need?

To get an explosive chain reaction, uranium-235 needs to be concentrated significantly more than the levels we use in nuclear reactors for making power or medicines.

Technically, a nuclear weapon can be made with as little as 20 per cent uranium-235 (known as "highly enriched uranium"), but the more the uranium is enriched, the smaller and lighter the weapon can be. Countries with nuclear weapons tend to use about 90 per cent enriched, "weapons-grade" uranium.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran has enriched large quantities of uranium to 60 per cent. It's actually easier to go from an enrichment of 60 per cent to 90 per cent than it is to get to that initial 60 per cent. That's because there's less and less uranium-238 to get rid of.

This is why Iran is considered to be at extreme risk of producing nuclear weapons, and why centrifuge technology for enrichment is kept secret.

Ultimately, the exact same centrifuge technology that produces fuel for civilian reactors can be used to produce nuclear weapons.

Inspectors from the IAEA monitor nuclear facilities worldwide to ensure countries are abiding by the rules set out in the global nuclear non-proliferation treaty. While Iran maintains it's only enriching uranium for "peaceful purposes", late last week the IAEA board ruled Iran was in breach of its obligations under the treaty. *—PTI*

Israel hits Tehran harder post Trump warning

Iran's responses seem to falter as IDF claims it destroyed missile launchers

DUBAI, 18 JUNE

Israeli warplanes pounded Iran's capital overnight and into Wednesday, hitting a facility used to make uranium centrifuges and another that made missile components, the Israeli military said. It said it intercepted 10 missiles overnight as Iran's retaliatory barrages diminish.

Iran meanwhile warned that any US intervention in the conflict would risk "all-out war in the region."

Israel is carrying out blistering attacks on Iran's nuclear program and military sites that began with a surprise bombardment on Friday. A Washington-based Iranian human rights group said at least 585 people, including 239 civilians, have been killed and more than 1,300 wounded.

Shops have been closed across Tehran, including in its famed Grand Bazaar, as people wait in gas lines and pack roads leading out of the city to escape the onslaught.

The latest Israeli strikes hit a facility used to make uranium centrifuges and another that made missile components, the Israeli military said. It said it had intercepted 10 missiles overnight as Iran's retaliatory barrages diminish. The UN nuclear watchdog said Israel had struck two centrifuge production facilities in and near Tehran.

Iran has fired some 400 missiles and hundreds of drones in retaliatory strikes that have killed at least 24 people in Israel and wounded hundreds. Some have hit apartment buildings in central Israel, causing heavy damage, and air raid sirens have repeatedly forced Israelis to run for shelter. *—PTI*

Israeli defense system fires to intercept Iranian missiles during an attack on Tel Aviv on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

> **I'm not looking at a ceasefire. We're looking at better than a ceasefire... I'm not too much in the mood to negotiate**
>
> —Donald Trump, US President

> **Any American intervention would be a recipe for an all-out war in the region**
>
> — Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader

> **This is the dirty work Israel is doing for all of us. We are also victims of (Iranian) regime. This mullah regime has brought death and destruction to the world**
>
> — Friedrich Merz, German Chancellor

> **(Israel) has not been able to bring big damage to our nuclear facilities... We will continue to produce the enriched uranium as far as we need it for peaceful purposes**
>
> — Ali Bahreini, Iran Ambassador

Iran asks its people to delete WhatsApp from their devices, says it is 'spying'

Iranian state television on Tuesday afternoon urged the country's public to delete WhatsApp from their phones, alleging the app — without offering specific evidence — gathered user information to send to Israel. WhatsApp, in response said it was "concerned these false reports will be an excuse for our services to be blocked at a time when people need them the most." Iran has blocked access to various social media platforms over the years. It banned WhatsApp and Google Play in 2022 during mass protests against the government over the death of a woman. That ban was lifted late last year.

Israel kills at least 51 Palestinians near aid site

At least 51 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli Army, and over 200 injured while waiting for UN and commercial aid trucks in Khan Younis, according to local health officials. Eyewitnesses reported that Israeli forces opened fire on a crowd gathered by an aid truck, following an airstrike on a nearby home. The Israeli military acknowledged "several casualties" and stated that an investigation would be launched.

Israel claims its aircraft destroyed 5 Iranian choppers

Israel's military said it has destroyed five Iranian AH-1 attack helicopters at a base in western Iran in the Kermanshah area. Israel published black-and-white video of the bombing destroying the helicopters. Iran did not immediately comment. Iran under the shah purchased some 200 of the Bell AH-1 SuperCobras, which remain in service as Iran is sanctioned internationally and broadly unable to purchase new weaponry.

Islamic Republic is falling: Exiled Iran crown prince

TEHRAN, 18 JUNE

Exiled Iranian crown prince Reza Pahlavi said the Islamic Republic is collapsing and sought a regime change in Tehran. He said the time has has come for Iranians to "reclaim Iran".

Pahlavi said Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is like a "frightened rat who has gone into hiding".

"The Islamic Republic has come to its end and is collapsing. What has begun is irreversible. The future is bright, and together we will turn the page of history. Now is the time to stand up; the time to reclaim Iran. May I be with you soon," he posted on X.

In a video he posted on X, said, "The end of Islamic Republic is the end of 46-year-war against the Iranian nation... Now is the time to rise; the time to reclaim Iran. Let us all come forward – from Bandar Abbas to Bandar Anzali, from Shiraz to Isfahan, from Tabriz to Zahedan, from Mashhad to Ahvaz, from Shahr-e Kord to Kermanshah – and bring about the end of this regime." *—Agencies*

Seven suspects identified in $100M US jewellery theft

LOS ANGELES, 18 JUNE

Seven people have been identified and charged with stalking an armoured truck to a rural freeway rest stop north of Los Angeles and stealing USD 100 million worth of diamonds, emeralds and more in what is believed to be the largest jewellery heist in US history, federal authorities announced on Tuesday. Two of the seven suspects have been arrested and were due in federal court in Los Angeles on Tuesday, court records showed. Four of them remained at-large on Tuesday, while one is serving prison time in Arizona for an unrelated burglary and was expected to appear in court in Los Angeles in the coming weeks. The heist unfolded in July 2022 near San Francisco. *—PTI*

30,000 evacuated as heavy floods hit southern China

HUAIJI COUNTY, 18 JUNE

Severe flooding in southern China has led to the evacuation of approximately 30,000 people as torrential rains overwhelmed towns in Guangdong province. The Suijiang River overflowed, transforming streets into canals and submerging over half of the county's roads. Aerial images reveal high-rise buildings inundated by water, with the flood reaching as high as the first floor of some buildings. The bad weather was compounded by Tropical Storm Wutip and subsequent monsoon rainfall. Rescue efforts are underway, with teams using rubber dinghies to deliver food and evacuate those in distress, including hospital patients and vulnerable children. In Guangxi, two landslides triggered by the storm claimed five lives. *—PTI*

Imran Khan defers protest due to global tensions

ISLAMABAD, 18 JUNE

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has postponed for two weeks his party's planned nationwide protest because of ongoing global developments following the Iran-Israel conflict. Earlier last month, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder had said he will lead his party's upcoming protest against the Central government, from prison. However, the exact date of the protest was not announced. Speaking to reporters outside Adiala Jail on Tuesday, Khan's sister Noreen Niazi said, "Imran Khan is aware of global developments and has stressed the importance of national cohesion. We are awaiting policy statements from the prime minister, president, and field marshal before proceeding further." *—PTI*

Putin set to face international press

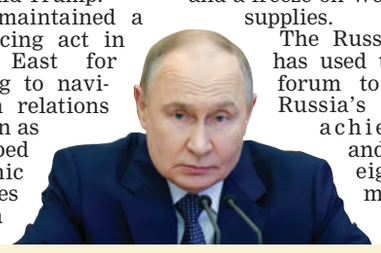
ST PETERSBURG, 18 JUNE

Russian President Vladimir Putin is set to take questions on Wednesday from international journalists on the sidelines of the St Petersburg International Economic Forum.

Putin scheduled a roundtable session with senior news leaders of international news agencies. He may spell out Moscow's position on the conflict between Israel and Iran that he offered to help mediate in a weekend call with US President Donald Trump.

Russia has maintained a delicate balancing act in the Middle East for decades, trying to navigate its warm relations with Israel even as it has developed strong economic and military ties with Iran, a policy that potentially opens opportunities for Moscow to play power broker to help end the confrontation.

Putin's comments will also be watched closely for clues to his strategy in the three-year conflict in Ukraine, where Russia has intensified its aerial campaign and stepped up ground attacks along the more than 1,000km front line. He has effectively rejected Trump's offer of an immediate 30-day ceasefire, making it conditional on a halt on Ukraine's mobilisation effort and a freeze on Western arms supplies.



The Russian leader has used the annual forum to highlight Russia's economic achievements and seek foreign investment. *—PTI*

EU warns Russia could start a new war

Russia poses a direct threat to the European Union through acts of sabotage and cyber attacks, but its massive military spending suggests that President Vladimir Putin also plans to use his armed forces elsewhere in the future, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte warned on Wednesday. He said Russia is producing as much weapons and ammunition in three months as the 32 allies together make in a year. He believes that Russia could be in a position to launch an attack on a NATO ally by the end of the decade.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi poses for a group picture with G7 leaders and leaders from outreach countries, international organisations and invited guests on the sidelines of the G7 Summit at Kananaskis in Canada on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

G7 CALLS FOR CEASEFIRE IN GAZA

KANANASKIS, 18 JUNE

- After US President Trump left the summit, the six remaining members discussed Russia's war in Ukraine and the Israel-Iran conflict but failed to reach major agreements on those and other top issues

The Group of Seven called for "de-escalation of hostilities in the Middle East, including a ceasefire in Gaza". The statement was issued by all seven nations, including the US.

In the absence of US President Donald Trump, six of the remaining seven G7 leaders discussed Russia's war in Ukraine and the Israel-Iran conflict but failed to reach major agreements on those and many other top issues - closing a summit that attempted to show how the wealthy nations' club might still shape global policy.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and his counterparts from the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Japan were joined during Tuesday's final sessions by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and NATO Chief Mark Rutte.

"We need support from allies and I'm here," Zelenskyy said.

The leaders agreed to jointly attempt to combat what they called non-market policies that could jeopardise global access to critical minerals. They also pledged to limit the downsides of artificial intelligence on jobs and the environment, while still embracing the potential of the "technological revolution."

There was consensus on other issues, including the Iran-Israel war and no joint statement on the conflict in Ukraine. Zelenskyy was set to meet with Trump while world leaders were gathering in the Canadian Rocky Mountain resort of Kananaskis, but that was scrapped. The US also previously signed an agreement granting American access to Ukraine's vast mineral resources.

A senior Canadian official who briefed reporters at the summit said the US opposed a joint statement on Ukraine, amid its efforts to promote negotiations with Russia. Trump notably dug up the issue of Russia's expulsion from the then G8, irking the other leaders. *—PTI*

US court may allow Trump control of NG troops

WASHINGTON, 18 JUNE

A US federal appeals court on Tuesday appeared inclined to let President Donald Trump retain control of California National Guard (CNG) troops deployed to Los Angeles after protests over immigration raids. A district court had ruled last week that Trump's deployment was unlawful, ordering control be returned to Governor Gavin Newsom. However, the ruling was paused pending appeal.

A protester holds up an American flag in front of a dumpster that was set on fire during a protest against federal immigration arrests **PHOTO: PTI**

The protests erupted after immigration agents arrested dozens across the city, sparking outrage and a demonstration outside a detention centre. Trump deployed troops on 7 June, citing a need to protect federal property. Newsom criticised the move, saying it escalated tensions unnecessarily.

The appeals court session, held Tuesday in San Francisco, focused on whether Trump overstepped his authority under Title 10 of US law. Judges from both Republican and Democratic administrations questioned the legality but noted precedent granting Presidents' wide discretion in such matters. *—PTI*

AHEAD OF UN CLIMATE TALKS

Brazil auctions off oil sites near Amazon

BRASILANDIA, 18 JUNE

Brazil auctioned off several land and offshore potential oil sites near the Amazon River on Tuesday as it aims to expand production in untapped regions, despite protests from environmental and Indigenous groups.

The event came months before Brazil is to host the UN's first climate talks held in the Amazon. Protesters outside Tuesday's venue warned of potential risks that oil drilling poses to the ecosystems and Indigenous communities.

A luxury Rio de Janeiro hotel hosted the auction conducted by the National Oil Agency. Most of the 172 oil blocks for sale are located in areas with no current production, such as 47 offshore locations close to the mouth of the Amazon River and two sites inland in the Amazon near Indigenous territories.

Protesters warned of potential risks that oil drilling poses to the ecosystems and Indigenous communities **PHOTO: X**

Nineteen offshore blocks were awarded to Chevron, ExxonMobil, Petrobras and CNPC. The oil companies see the area as highly promising because it shares geological characteristics with Guyana, where some of the largest offshore oil discoveries of the 21st century have been made.

Under pressure from President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources, known as IBAMA, approved an emergency plan allowing state-run Petrobras to conduct exploratory drilling in a block near the mouth of the Amazon River, the last step to grant an environmental license.

"This is an irresponsible move by the National Oil Agency and a very risky one for the companies involved," Nicole Oliveira, Executive Director of the environmental nonprofit Arayara, which tried to block the auction in court said.

The auction ended with 34 oil blocks awarded. *—PTI*

VOLCANIC ERUPTION IN INDONESIA FORCES EVACUATIONS

Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki sends plumes of ash and debris into the air in Indonesia's East Nusa Tenggara province on Wednesday **PHOTO: X**

LEMBATA, 18 JUNE

- Several eruptions sent ash up to 5km into the sky from Tuesday evening to Wednesday afternoon. An eruption on Tuesday afternoon sent clouds 10km into the sky that was visible from 150km away

Indonesia's Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki erupted with giant ash and smoke plumes again on Wednesday after forcing evacuations of villages and flight cancellations, including those to and from the resort island of Bali.

Several eruptions sent ash up to 5km into the sky from Tuesday evening to Wednesday afternoon. An eruption on Tuesday afternoon sent thick, gray clouds 10km into the sky that expanded into a mushroom-shaped ash cloud visible as much as 150km away.

The eruption alert was raised on Tuesday to the highest level and the danger zone where people are recommended to leave was expanded to 8km from the crater.

Officers also evacuated from the Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki monitoring post 7km from the crater to avoid falling of gravel released in the eruption. No casualties have been reported.

Ash and debris fell in a number of places outside the danger zone, including the villages of Boru, Hewa and Watobuku. Some residents from Nurabelen village in Ile Bura subdistrict moved to Konga to avoid the impact of the eruption, the National Disaster Management Agency said. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 13P to close at 86.47 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

The rupee depreciated 13 paise to close at 86.47 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, dragged down by risk-off sentiments and elevated crude oil prices. Forex traders said the rupee dwindled amid weak domestic equity markets and the broad strength of the dollar. Moreover, elevated global crude oil prices and selling pressure from foreign investors also weighed on the local unit, they said, adding that the domestic markets are falling on risk aversion in the global markets amid the ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.17 per cent at 98.65. *—PTI*

Telangana govt launches Google Safety Centre

HYDERABAD, 18 JUNE

The Google Safety Engineering Centre (GSEC India) was inaugurated in Hyderabad on Wednesday, marking its first facility in the Asia-Pacific region and the fourth globally. Telangana Chief Minister Anumula Revanth Reddy and IT Minister D Sridhar Babu officiated the launch, as announced in a press release by the tech giant. This centre signifies a vital step in Google's commitment to securing India's digital future. GSEC India will serve as the operational hub where strategic objectives are transformed into practical solutions. The centre will implement the foundational pillars of Google's Safety Charter, which includes protecting users from online fraud, enhancing cybersecurity for government and enterprise infrastructure, and promoting responsible AI development across the wider APAC region. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Reddit appoints Sachin Tendulkar brand ambassador

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Reddit has appointed Indian cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar as its brand ambassador, aiming to deepen its engagement with sports fans in India and globally. Through his official Reddit profile, Tendulkar will share personal reflections, match insights, and exclusive content. He will also feature in an upcoming marketing campaign across India and other markets. Tendulkar said cricket has always been about genuine connection, and he was impressed by Reddit's passionate communities. Durgesh Kaushik, Reddit's Vice President of International Growth, said Tendulkar symbolises cricketing excellence and unites fans worldwide. Reddit has seen a 30 per cent year-on-year rise in sports interest on the platform. *—PTI*

Banks' supervisory Data Quality Index improved: RBI

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

Supervisory Data Quality Index of commercial banks has improved to 89.3 in March 2025 compared to 88.6 in the year-ago period, the Reserve Bank said on Wednesday. The RBI has created a supervisory Data Quality Index (sDQI) that measures data quality in terms of accuracy, timeliness, completeness and consistency in various key financial parameters, including bad loans, asset-liability and capital adequacy. The index will help the regulator assess the financial health of commercial banks, including small finance banks. The sDQI for SCBs covers 87 SCBs and their key returns, including return on asset liability and off-balance sheet exposures, return on asset quality, return on operating results and liquidity return. *—PTI*

Oil prices near 5-month high amid Israel–Iran tension

Surge poses risk to India's current account deficit

- Traders fear the possibility of disruption to Iran's crude oil exports of 1.5-2 million barrels per day (mmbpd) out of a total of 3.4 mmbpd.Traders remain on edge as the conflict shows no signs of easing

BENGALURU/NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Crude oil prices persist to rise and reach a five-month high despite the increasing tension between Israel and Iran for the sixth consecutive day, on Wednesday.

On Wednesday, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose by 0.64 per cent, following a 4.3 per cent surge the previous day, marking its highest level since January.

Traders fear the possibility of disruption to Iran's crude oil exports of 1.5-2 million barrels per day (mmbpd) out of a total of 3.4 mmbpd.

The Brent crude surged 0.5 per cent after the previous day's session with a rise of 4.4 per cent touching USD 76.70 per barrel, the highest since February.

Traders remain on edge as the conflict shows no signs of easing. Both country's military activities since Friday have raised concerns of a border regional war and a possible US military involvement.

Additionally, on Tuesday US President Donald Trump in social media post before the meeting with the national security team demanded Iran's "unconditional surrender", warning a potential attack against the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Meanwhile, India's current account deficit (CAD) for FY25 faces an upward risk, as every USD 10 per barrel increase in oil prices can worsen the annual CAD by nearly USD 15 billion, said a report by Union Bank of India. It has retained its CAD estimate at 0.9 per cent of GDP for FY25 but flagged a marginal upside risk due to commodity price pressures. Looking ahead, the CAD is projected to widen to 1.2 per cent of GDP in FY26.

The Brent crude prices have fluctuated between USD 64 to USD 76 over the last month. Amid geopolitical conflict, crude prices have surged 14 per cent in the last 15 days.

However, weak global demand and tepid export growth may limit the overall impact. *—PTI & ANI*

TCS, ADANI PORTS WORST HIT

Market indices fall for 2nd day amid Middle East tensions

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

PHOTO: PTI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower on Wednesday as soaring tensions in the Middle East and caution ahead of the US Fed interest rate decision hit investor sentiment.

Surrendering its early gains, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 138.64 points or 0.17 per cent to close at 81,444.66. After a weak opening, the index hit a high of 81,858.97 in morning deals but failed to hold onto gains later. The barometer dipped 346.29 points or 0.42 per cent to hit a low of 81,237.01.

The 50-share NSE Nifty edged lower by 41.35 points or 0.17 per cent to settle at 24,812.05, marking its second day of losses.

Among Sensex firms, Tata Consultancy Services was the biggest loser dropping by 1.79 per cent. Adani Ports fell by 1.55 per cent, Hindustan Unilever by 1.35 per cent, Bajaj Finserv by 1.16 per cent, and Nestle by 0.95 per cent. Losses in ICICI Bank, Larsen & Toubro, Infosys, NTPC and HCL Tech also dragged the index down.

On the other hand, IndusInd Bank surged by 5.12 per cent after a report expressed optimism over its performance in the coming 12 months.

Titan rose by 1.99 per cent, Mahindra & Mahindra by 1.24 per cent and Maruti by 1.12 per cent.

Israeli pounded Tehran after Iran launched a small barrage of missiles at Israel with no reports of casualties.

The BSE midcap and smallcap indices ended 0.34 per cent lower each.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dropped 1.35 per cent to USD 75.42 a barrel. *—PTI*

Reliance, Dassault to make Falcon 2000 jets in India

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

PHOTO: X

Anil Ambani's Reliance Infrastructure has partnered with French aerospace giant Dassault Aviation to manufacture Falcon 2000 business jets in India, marking a significant leap for the nation's civil aviation sector.

Announced at the Paris Air Show, the collaboration will establish a final assembly line in Nagpur, Maharashtra—the first time Falcon 2000 jets will be produced outside France. This milestone places India among an elite group of countries manufacturing business jets, alongside the US, France, Canada, and Brazil.

The joint venture, Dassault Reliance Aerospace Limited (DRAL), was formed in 2017 and has already delivered over 100 sub-sections for the Falcon 2000. With this new agreement, DRAL will oversee the complete fuselage and wing assembly for the Falcon 2000, as well as front section production for the Falcon 6X and 8X.

By 2028, the first fully assembled Falcon 2000 is expected to take flight from Indian soil.

Eric Trappier, CEO of Dassault Aviation, reaffirmed the firm's commitment to the "Make in India" initiative, calling India a strategic partner in the global aerospace supply chain.

The joint venture is expected to generate hundreds of high-skilled jobs over the next decade and reinforce India's emergence as a global aerospace manufacturing hub. *—PTI*

India a 'bright spot' amid global uncertainty: CEA

T'PURAM/KOLKATA/ NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

India remains a rare "bright spot" in a world facing growing uncertainty, said Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) V Anantha Nageswaran, pointing to the country's steady economic performance despite ongoing global challenges.

The CEA said that while conflicts and disruptions have been part of the global scene since 2022, they have become more intense and unpredictable, making the overall environment – whether political, economic or security-related – far more difficult for growth across the world.

"You could say that downside risks are higher than the potential for upside surprises," Nages waran said.

Meanwhile, leading ratings agency ICRA has projected in its latest outlook that India's real GDP growth for 2025–26 financial year will exceed 6.5 per cent and the real Gross Value Added (GVA) growth will surpass 6.3 per cent during the same period.

Regarding inflation, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is expected to be above 4.2 per cent, while the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) will be over 2.7 per cent for the current fiscal, the report added.

Entities in the Indian Defence sector are also expected to witness robust growth momentum, with expected revenue expansion of 15-17 per cent in FY2026, the ICRA said. *—PTI& ANI*

Vedanta sells 1.6% stake in HZL for ₹3K crore

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Anil Agarwal-led Vedanta Ltd has sold a 1.6 per cent stake in its subsidiary, Hindustan Zinc Ltd (HZL), raising approximately Rs 3,028 crore.

The stake—equivalent to 66.7 million shares—was divested to institutional investors via an accelerated bookbuild process, the company said in a regulatory filing on Wednesday.

The proceeds will support Vedanta's ongoing efforts to de-leverage its balance sheet and enhance financial flexibility, especially as it moves forward with the planned demerger of its businesses. The company stated the transaction underscores investor confidence in its strategic direction, citing recent gains in production, cost efficiency, and debt reduction.

Vedanta expects to complete the demerger by the end of September 2025. *—PTI*

Gold gains ₹540 to cross ₹1 lakh/10g

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Gold gained Rs 540 to stay above Rs 1 lakh per 10g in the national capital on Wednesday as the Israel-Iran conflict intensified on its sixth day, driving investors to safe-haven assets.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, gold of 99.9 per cent purity climbed by Rs 540 to Rs 1,00,710 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes) on Wednesday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity appreciated by Rs 500 to Rs 99,950 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes).

As per the Sarafa Association, silver had closed at Rs 1,07,200 per kg in the preceding session on Tuesday.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, the most traded August contract for gold futures was trading at Rs 99,411 per 10g, lower by Rs 130 per 10g.

Spot gold fell 0.23 per cent to USD 3,380.97 in the global markets. *—PTI*

SEBI wants change in accreditation of AIF investors

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has proposed significant changes regarding the accreditation of investors in Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs). Currently, only subsidiaries of stock exchanges and depositories are permitted to act as accreditation agencies. Sebi's consultation paper suggests that all KYC registration agencies (KRAs) should be eligible for accreditation agency status.

The regulator believes this move could increase the number of accreditation agencies and foster competition, leading to more cost-efficient services. Currently, only two agencies—CDSL Ventures Ltd and NSDL Data Management Ltd—serve this role. *—PTI*

Vodafone, SpaceMobile partner for satcom service

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Debt-ridden telecom operator Vodafone Idea on Wednesday announced a partnership with Elon Musk-owned SpaceX rival satcom firm AST SpaceMobile for delivering satellite service on smartphones directly.

AST SpaceMobile is building the first and only space-based cellular broadband network accessible directly by smartphones, designed for both commercial and government applications, Vodafone Idea said in a statement. Vodafone Idea's promoter firm Vodafone Plc has already signed a pact with AST SpaceMobile.

During 2024, AST SpaceMobile has secured additional strategic investment from AT&T, Verizon, Google and Vodafone, and new contract awards with the United States Government, directly and through prime contractors. The company has agreements with more than 45 mobile network operators globally,

"This partnership will bring together Vi's robust national network with AST SpaceMobile's revolutionary space-based cellular technology, which connects directly to everyday smartphones without the need of any specialised software or device support or updates," the statement said.

Vi said that it will collaborate with AST SpaceMobile on the SpaceMobile Satellite System and to develop commercial offerings for diverse sectors, including consumer, enterprise and IoT, the statement said. *—PTI*

TO SELL SHARES AND RAISE $2.5B

MakeMyTrip plans to cut Trip.com's stake

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

- AThe Gurugram-headquartered NASDAQ-listed firm plans to use the net proceeds from the offering, as well as from the Concurrent Notes Offering, to repurchase a portion of its Class B shares previously acquired by Trip.com

Travel booking major MakeMyTrip has announced a fundraise of over USD 2.5 billion through the sale of shares and convertible bonds with the objective of significantly reducing China-based Trip.com Group's stake in the company, according to filings with NASDAQ.

The Gurugram-headquartered NASDAQ-listed firm plans to use the net proceeds from the offering, as well as from the Concurrent Notes Offering, to repurchase a portion of its Class B shares previously acquired by Trip.com.

Notably, the move comes in the backdrop of calls for minimising business relations with companies and investors from countries like China and Turkey, which are seen as supporters of Pakistan, following last month's India-Pakistan military conflict.

Rival travel agency EaseMyTrip's founder Nishant Pitti had last month turned up the heat on MakeMyTrip over the alleged Chinese ownership of the latter, saying 5 out of its 10 board of directors have direct ties to China.

Upon successful execution of the share repurchase exercise, Trip.com's total voting power in the company is reduced from 45.34 per cent to 19.99 per cent, and its board nomination rights will be reduced from five directors to two, in accordance with the Terms of Issue, MakeMyTrip stated.

In the NASDAQ filing, the company also informed that it is offering 14,000,000 ordinary shares, par value USD 0.0005 per share, in this offering. "Concurrently with this offering, we are offering, USD 1.25 billion aggregate principal amount of convertible senior notes, plus up to USD 187.5 million aggregate principal amount of our convertible senior notes if the initial purchasers in the convertible notes offering exercise in full their option to purchase additional convertible senior notes, which we refer to as the Concurrent Notes Offering," it said. *—PTI*

Goyal on 2-day London visit; to discuss FTA

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Indian Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has arrived in London for a two-day official visit aimed at advancing the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the UK.

According to an official statement, Goyal will meet with UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade, Jonathan Reynolds, to assess the progress of ongoing FTA negotiations and establish a clear, time-bound roadmap for its finalisation.

The FTA, announced on 6 May, aims to eliminate duties on Indian labour-intensive exports, including leather, footwear, and clothing, while easing imports of UK products such as whisky and cars. The goal is to double trade between the two nations to USD 120 billion by 2030, but the agreement has yet to be formally signed and implemented.

During his visit, Goyal will also confer with UK Chancellor Rachel Reeves to discuss macroeconomic priorities and investment facilitation, as well as meet Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Lisa Nandy, to explore collaborations in creative industries. The minister is expected to engage with leading CEOs and industry stakeholders from various sectors to strengthen commercial ties and encourage cross-border investments. Bilateral trade between the two countries rose to USD 21.34 billion in 2023-24, up from USD 20.36 billion in 2022-23. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Kangana named brand ambassador of WPA C'ships

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Actor-cum-politician Kangana Ranaut was on Wednesday named brand ambassador of the World Para Athletics Championships to be held here in September-October. The 39-year-old Ranaut, who garnered acclaim for her performances in films like 'Fashion' and 'Queen', represents Himachal Pradesh's Mandi constituency in the current Lok Sabha."India's para athletes are rewriting what is possible every single day. I am deeply honoured to support them and help raise awareness about their incredible achievements. Para sport is not just about competition it is about courage, and I am proud to stand behind our champions," Ranaut said.—*PTI*

Junior hockey team departs for 4-nation tourney in Berlin

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

India's junior men's hockey team left for Berlin on Wednesday to compete in a four-nation Tournament from June 21 to 25, continuing its preparations for the World Cup to be held later this year. Led by Captain Araijeet Singh Hundal with Amir Ali as his deputy, the Indian colts, who left early this morning from Bengaluru, will begin their campaign against host nation, Germany on 21 June. They will then face Australia on 22 June, followed by Spain on June 24 during the round-robin stage. All matches will take place in Berlin. The tournament will conclude with classification matches on 25 June, where the top two teams from the pool will compete for the championship, while the remaining two will contest the third-place position. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Ramos gives Inter a scare in Club World Cup stalemate

PASADENA, 18 JUNE

Sergio Ramos leaped in the air and soared back in time. The 39-year-old center back slipped through the penalty area, outfoxed two Inter Milan players, and artfully headed home the first goal for Monterrey in the Club World Cup on Tuesday night. Just as he did for so many years in the shirts of Real Madrid and Spain's national team, Ramos combined smarts, timing, and physicality to make an enormous play on an international stage. Ramos's clever goal and his overall defensive play at the Rose Bowl were major factors in Monterrey's impressive 1-1 draw against the Champions League finalists in the clubs.—*PTI*

Top seed Levan Pantsulaia outclasses Kolla

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

Top seed GM Levan Pantsulaia of Georgia defeated Bhaavan Kolla in the second round to maintain his fine run in the Aurionpro Mumbai International Grandmaster Chess Tournament here on Wednesday. Pantsulaia showcased his class by defeating Kolla in 33 moves with the French variation of the Sicilian Defence. Meanwhile, GM Manuel Petrosyan employed the London System and brilliantly converted an exchange sacrifice into a full point against Prakash Ram, while GM Luka Paichadze played a sharp and aggressive Caro-Kann to dismantle Rachit Gurnani. However, the second round wasn't without its surprises as Hemal Varshan held Manas Gaikwad.—*PTI*

Harshit Rana added to Indian squad for first Test in Leeds

Virat Kohli will be missed more in England than Rohit: Boycott

LEEDS, 18 JUNE

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced that the Men's Selection Committee has added Harshit Rana to India's squad for the first Test in Leeds against England.

Rana, who was a part of the India A squad, has linked up with the team as India begin preparations for the first Test Rana made his debut on India's tour of Australia in November 2024, and nabbed four wickets in his first Test in Perth, playing a pivotal role in India's mammoth win by 295 runs.

Rana finished the game with a wicket and was also handy with the bat, as he struck two maximums off England spinner Rehan Ahmed.

He will accompany veteran Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Arshdeep Singh, Prasidh Krishna, and Akash Deep in India's pace attack, alongside all-rounders Shardul Thakur and Nitish Kumar Reddy.

Led by newly-appointed skipper Shubman Gill, India are set to take on England in their first assignment of the upcoming ICC World Test Championship cycle in a much-anticipated five-match series.

India will miss **Virat Kohli** more than Rohit Sharma in the marquee Test series against England and the duo's recent retirement from the format will "hurt" the transitioning team's chances in the rubber starting on Friday, reckons the legendary Geoffrey Boycott.

India's Harshit Rana during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy PHOTO: PTI

The two heavyweights of world cricket will engage in five matches over the next six weeks, beginning their campaigns in the new World Test Championship (WTC) cycle."The retirement of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma hurts the chances of India beating England. Kohli is the biggest loss as he has been their best batsman and talisman in all three formats," Boycott wrote in his column for the Daily Telegraph."With so much international cricket played by India, and so little rest, it takes its toll and the mind becomes fatigued."The former England captain called Kohli's absence a bigger blow."It does not matter how much talent or experience you have, if you are not mentally fresh and up for the challenge, then it becomes draining.Rohit was a superb batsman. At his best, a beautiful stroke player, but he won't be missed as much as Kohli, because his Test record was good rather than exceptional.

Virat Kohli

James Anderson

Missing James Anderson: A constant in India-England rivalry since 2006

To say the least, a relatively inexperienced batting lineup led by Shubman Gill would be relieved to see the name of James Anderson, once a constant in the multiple chapters of India-England rivalry over the past two decades, missing in the opposition roster.

From Anderson's first series against India in 2006 to the last one in 2024, the age defying fast bowler kept the celebrated Indian batting line-up on their toes his battles with the great Sachin Tendulkar in late 2000s or the much more animated duels with Virat Kohli in the previous decade still fresh in one's mind.

England want to have a good surface to hit through the line against India: Leeds curator

The unusually dry weather here, combined with England's aggressive style of play, has increased expectations of a "good surface" for the opening Test against India beginning on Friday, Leeds head of grounds Richard Robinson has said.

Leeds usually hosts a Test in the middle of a series but staging of the opening game has attracted a lot more attention.

"They (England) just want to have a good surface so it's true, really, so we can hit through the line of the ball. That's really what they're looking for," Richard Robsinon, head of grounds at Leeds, was quoted as saying by 'ESPNCricinfo'. —*PTI*

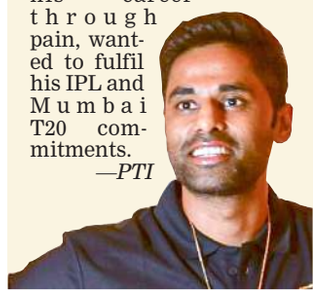
SKY flies to England for sports hernia treatment

NEW DELHI, 18 MAY

India's T20 skipper Suryakumar Yadav has flown to England to consult a specialist for treating a sports hernia related injury, and, if necessary, he could undergo surgery.

Surya, 33, had a terrific IPL for Mumbai Indians, scoring over 700 runs, and also played the Mumbai Premier League T20 soon after.

It is not known if the pain was aggravated during the Mumbai T20 league, as Surya had a gruelling three months of travelling and playing at a stretch. "Surya is suffering from a Sports hernia on the right side lower abdomen. He has gone to the UK for consultation. If required, he will be going under the knife," a source close to the cricketer told PTI on condition of anonymity. Surya, who has played a lot of matches in his career through pain, wanted to fulfil his IPL and Mumbai T20 commitments. —*PTI*



Petra Kvitova gets a wild card for this year's tournament

LONDON, 18 JUNE

Petra Kvitova is returning to Wimbledon after the 2011 and 2014 champion was awarded a wild card Wednesday for this year's tournament.

Kvitova last played at the grass-court Grand Slam tournament in 2023, and became a mother for the first time when her son was born during last year's Wimbledon tournament.

Kvitova made her return to the WTA Tour in Austin, Texas, in February after 17 months away from the court and is currently ranked 572nd.

Kvitova, from the Czech Republic, was the only non-British player to get a singles wild card to the main draw on Wednesday.

The other seven players with wild cards for the women's draw include British players Heather Watson, Harriet Dart, and Jodie Burrage, while Dan Evans is among seven British players given a wild card for the men's draw. —*PTI*

SRI LANKA VS BANGLADESH

Rahim's marathon 163 puts B'desh in control

GALLE, 18 JUNE

Bangladesh rode on the broad shoulders of their veteran Mushfiqur Rahim to pile up a mammoth 484 for nine on a rain-curtailed day 2 of the first Test against Sri Lanka in Galle.It is their fourth-highest total in the longer format against Sri Lanka.

On a pitch that's expected to break up, Mushfiqur dug in deep, putting together a masterful 163 that lasted more than eight hours. He faced 350 deliveries, blending granite-like defense with the occasional flourish to lead the charge.

The old warhorse stitched together two crucial stands that wrested the momentum away from the hosts. First came a record-breaking 264-run partnership with captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, who looked in sublime touch during his knock of 148. Shanto, though, fell against the run of play, lured into a false stroke by Asitha Fernando and holing out to Angelo Mathews at mid-off, a sharp catch.

Undeterred, Mushfiqur then forged another valuable stand this time worth 149 runs with the free-spirited Litton Das, whose shot-making added zip to the innings. However, both set batters were dismissed in the space of nine deliveries just as they threatened to push Bangladesh past 500.Sri Lanka resorted to bowling a negative line, peppering the leg-side and starving the batters of scoring opportunities. It was a tactic born of desperation, but it bore fruit.

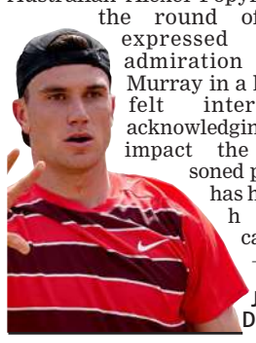
Mushfiqur Rahim

Das was dismissed trying to reverse sweep debutant Tharindu Rathnayake the top edge ballooning to the keeper. Bangladesh 484 for 9 (Mushfiqur 163, Shanto 148, Das 90, Rathnayake 3-38, Asitha 3-30) —*PTI*

Jack Draper's heartfelt tribute to Andy Murray

PARIS, 18 JUNE

In a stunning debut at the Queen's ATP 500 tournament, Jack Draper claimed victory in the first round. The 19-year-old, seeded second in the prestigious grass court event as a Wimbledon warm-up, defeated American Jenson Brooksby with an impressive 6-3, 6-1 scoreline in just 1 hour and 20 minutes of play. Draper, brimming with confidence, has high hopes for his grass court season and aims to make a mark in the upcoming matches. The central court at the London venue has been newly named after British tennis legend Andy Murray, a three-time Grand Slam champion with two Wimbledon titles (2013, 2016) and a US Open victory in 2012. Following his victory, Draper, who will face Australian Alexei Popyrin in the round of 16, expressed his admiration for Murray in a heartfelt interview, acknowledging the impact the seasoned player has had on his career. —*PTI*



Jack Draper

We're going to put our best foot forward: Pant

HEADINGLEY, 18 JUNE

India vice-captain Rishabh Pant on Wednesday said the players will keep the tragic Ahmedabad air crash in their minds, promising to make the country "happy" again by producing a stellar performance in the upcoming Test series against England.

A London-bound Air India flight crashed moments after its takeoff, killing 241 passengers and crew members aboard last week in one of the most gruesome tragedies in the country's aviation history.

"What happened in the aircraft (crash), I think the whole of India was disheartened, but at the same time, the only thing from our side...we are going to be sticking with them, how we can make India happy again," Pant said in a press conference here on Wednesday.

The wicket-keeper batter said the team will put its "best foot forward" in the five-match series, beginning here from Friday.

"The emotion is going to be high because of what happened in the crash, but at the same time, we are going to put our best foot forward for the country, how we can make them happy, and that's an added responsibility always," he added.

Elaborating his point in a general context, Pant said the Indian cricketers are always expected to register victories. —*PTI*

POSITIVE GAINS FOR SA PLAYERS IN ICC MEN'S TEST RANKINGS

South Africa's captain Temba Bavuma holds the winner's trophy and celebrates with teammates PHOTO: X

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

South Africa's triumphant march to their maiden ICC World Test Championship title has translated into significant gains in the latest ICC Men's Test Player Rankings, with several Proteas stars being richly rewarded for their match-winning performances at Lord's.

Markram, the Player of the Match in the WTC Final, headlined the rise, jumping seven places to 11th in the Test Batting Rankings just two points shy of New Zealand's Mitchell in 10th. He composed 136 off 207 balls in the second innings, powered South Africa to a 5-wicket win over Australia, ending a 27-year drought for a major ICC trophy. Markram's contribution with the ball also saw him surge an incredible 44 spots in the All-Rounders' Rankings. —*PTI*

HC junks BCCI's pleas, asks it to pay ₹ 538 cr

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

The Bombay High Court has dismissed the petitions of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) challenging arbitral awards of over Rs 538 crore in favour of the now-defunct Indian Premier League franchise Kochi Tuskers Kerala.

In the order passed on Tuesday, Justice R Chagla said there is no "patent illegality" in the arbitral awards that requires the court's intervention. It has asked BCCI to pay the amount.

The Kochi Tuskers Kerala franchise had been awarded to a consortium led by Rendezvous Sports World (RSW) and later operated by Kochi Cricket Private Limited (KCPL).

The team participated in the IPL in 2011, but their contract was terminated by the BCCI the following year.

The dispute revolved around BCCI's termination of agreements because KCPL and RSW allegedly failed to furnish a requisite bank guarantee.

The KCPL and RSW initiated arbitration proceedings in 2012, terming the termination wrongful. The arbitral tribunal ruled in their favour in 2015. —*PTI*

Barcelona signs goalkeeper Joan Garcia from Espanyol

LONDON, 30 OCT

Barcelona confirmed the signing of Spanish goalkeeper Joan Garcoa on a permanent deal from fellow La Liga club Espanyol on Wednesday.

The 24-year-old has signed a contract until 2031 with Barça and arrives to further strengthen a position which includes Marc-Andre ter Stegen, Wojciech Szczesny, and Inaki Pena.

Born in Catalonia, Garcia joined Espanyol in 2016 and progressed through the club's academy, eventually making his first team debut in 2021.He helped Espanyol win promotion to La Liga in 2024-25 season and featured in all 38 league games of the season as his side secured survival on the final day. During his time at Espanyol, he became a regular in Spain's youth national teams from the U17 to the U21 level, and he has an Olympic gold medal from the 2024 Games in Paris.

He becomes the first Espanyol player to move directly to Barca since Igor Korneev in 1994. —*PTI*

Joan Garcoa

FIFA'S CR7 FANTASY FAILS

Even Saudi Arabia couldn't get Ronaldo

Cristiano Ronaldo

MIAMI GARDENS,18 JUNE

Not even Saudi Arabia or Gianni Infantino could engineer a way to get Cristiano Ronaldo to the Club World Cup.

FIFA president Infantino certainly tried last month, making a public appeal ahead of the tournament."If any club is watching and is interested in hiring Ronaldo for the Club World Cup ...," he teased during an interview with YouTuber iShowSpeed. Ronaldo's contract with Saudi Arabian club Al-Nassr was due to expire, and FIFA's decision to create a specially-made mini transfer window for its newest competition meant the path was clear for the Real Madrid great to sign a short-term deal with a new team just in time to take part. Given his connection to Saudi Arabia, where he was the face of the oil-rich kingdom's spectacular drive to sign some of soccer's biggest stars in recent years, rumors began to circulate about a move to Al Hilal - the country's most successful team and its sole representative at the Club World Cup.

The problem was that Al Hilal and Al-Nassr are cross-city rivals in Riyadh. And even if Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund majority owns both teams, along with others, that was a step too far. "As much as I respect Ronaldo as a huge player, as we all recognize he is, it's certainly completely counter-intuitive that you bring the biggest player of your biggest opponent to play with you," Al Hilal chief executive Esteve Calzada told the BBC. "Even more when it's only for three to four weeks."

Maybe so, but Saudi Arabia, with its vast wealth, has a made habit out of turning the improbable into the possible. —*PTI*